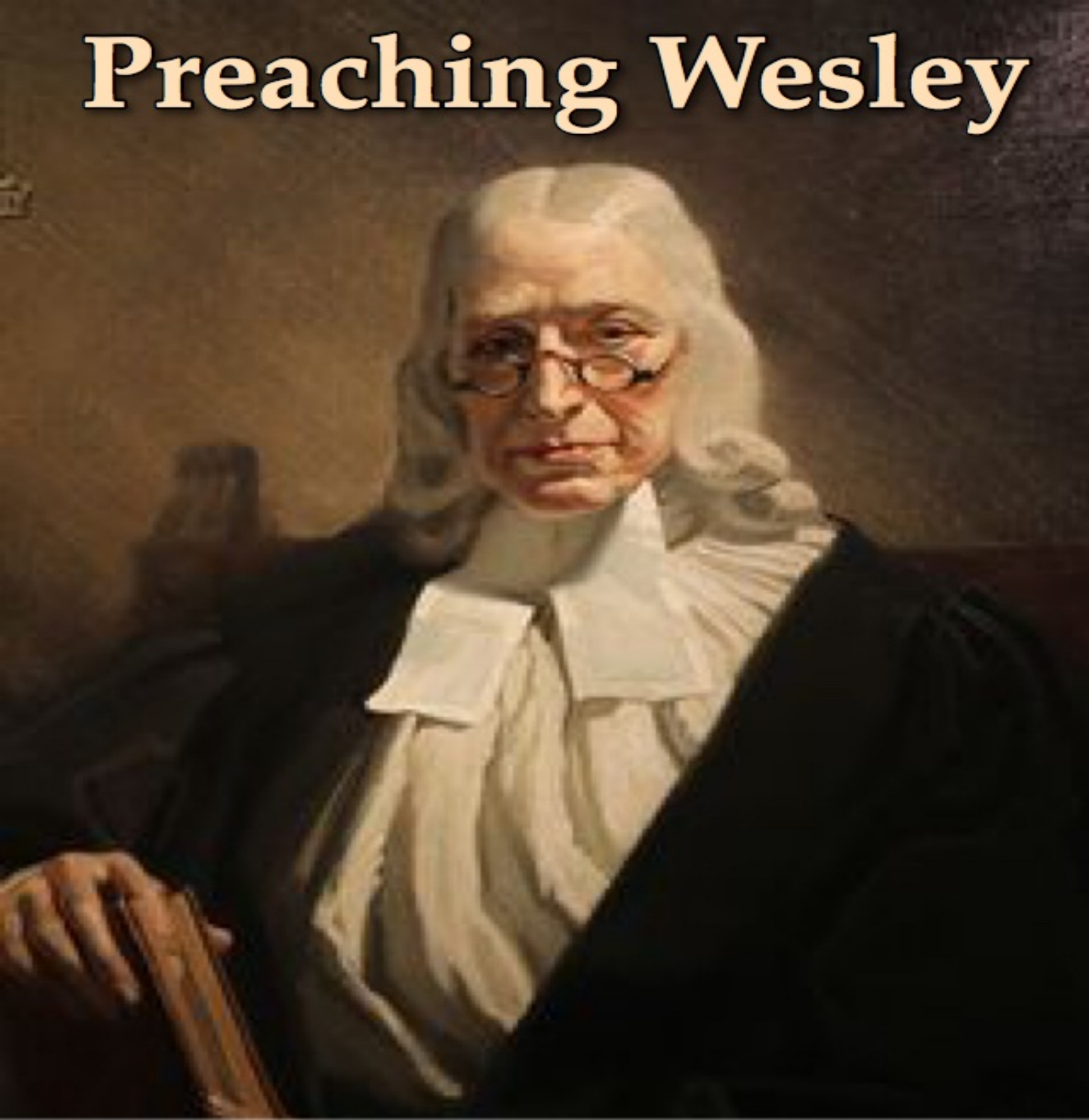
Preaching Wesley



John Wesley's 44 Sermons in Modern English

by Gary J. Hall

Preaching Wesley

by Gary J. Hall

Introduction

Wesley's standard forty-four sermons are largely unknown by Christians today. All most know about John Wesley is that he was the founder of the Methodist Church. But he also left behind a wealth of spiritual insight in his sermons. To remedy this situation, Gary J. Hall here preaches Wesley's sermons to the church of the 21st Century. This will not be a word for word recital of Wesley's sermons, instead the major themes of each sermon will be delivered by applying their central thoughts and where necessary making use of present day illustrations. It is our desire to see these used by likeminded ministers of the Gospel in preaching or Bible study groups.

Preaching Wesley

Salvation by Faith

The Almost Christian

Awake Thou that Sleepest

Scriptural Christianity

Justification by Faith

Righteousness by Faith

The Way to the Kingdom

The First-fruits of the Spirit

The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption

The Witness of the Spirit

The Witness of Our Own Spirit

The Means of Grace

The Circumcision of the Heart

The Marks of the New Birth
The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God
Sermon on the Mount 1
Sermon on the Mount 2
Sermon on the Mount 3
Sermon on the Mount 4
Sermon on the Mount 5
Sermon on the Mount 6
The Sermon on Mount 7
Sermon on the Mount 8
Sermon on the Mount 9
Sermon on the Mount 10
Sermon on the Mount 11
Sermon on the Mount 12
Sermon on the Mount 13
The Origin, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law
The Law Established Through Faith 1
The Law Established through Faith 2
The Nature of Enthusiasm
A Caution Against Bigotry
Catholic Spirit
Christian Perfection
Wandering Thoughts
Satan’s Devices

Original Sin
The New Birth
The Wilderness State
Heaviness through Manifold Temptations
Self-Denial
The Cure of Evil-speaking
The Use of Money

Salvation by Faith

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

Introduction

Grace is God's gift of unmerited favour. It is the greatest of all the blessings that we have received. This grace is as available to all today as it was when it was first offered by God. Since it is a gift we cannot do any good deed to obtain it, for we can never atone for our sin. We know that only rotten fruit grows on diseased trees, so no act of righteousness on our part merits saving grace. This being true, we understand that we have nothing to boast about before God or men. How can we not praise God for such grace that saves us!

But what of faith? God's grace is the source of salvation, but faith is the condition for receiving it. In this study we seek to understand what this faith is.

What kind of Faith is it that saves?

1. It is certain that it cannot be religious faith. By this we refer to the type of belief in God that adherents to false religions have. They do not have the faith that saves. Salvation requires true faith in God as revealed in the Scriptures. "But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). Therefore faith must be more than living moral lives based upon religious principles.

2. It cannot be the faith devils have. James 2:19 says, "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble." Devils know who Jesus is, but they cannot be saved … "I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God" (Luke 4:34).

3. It cannot be pre-Calvary faith. The disciples had left all to follow Jesus, they preached the good news about the Kingdom, they healed the sick and cast out devils, but it was not until the Saviour was sacrificed on the cross that they could receive saving grace by faith.

4. What kind of faith must it be? It must be faith in Christ alone rather than having head knowledge of Him. This means that there must be deep conviction in our souls that His blood alone atoned for our sin. "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth

unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9-10). The saved acknowledge the necessity of Christ's sacrificial death, and they believe that He rose again from the grave. Total reliance on His blood is the only means of salvation, that is, through His finished work on Calvary.

What salvation does this faith produce?

1. It is a present salvation. By this we mean that believers are immediately and literally saved the moment they accept God's saving grace by faith.
2. It is salvation from sin. The Lord Jesus Christ came to save us from sin, but if there has been no change in our lives then we are not saved. The saved are delivered from past and present sin.
3. Salvation from the guilt of sin. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13) … "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:1).
4. Salvation from fear of damnation. Condemnation reveals a lack of faith in God's grace. It is the feeling that God is still going to punish us for sins that Christ atoned for. This must be replaced with true faith … "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13).
5. Salvation from the power of sin. "And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin … We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not" (1 John 3:5, 5:18). This means that sin should no longer dominate our lives. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 John 3:9).
6. Salvation includes justification. We are made right with God through the blood of Jesus Christ. Those who have been justified grow towards perfection and the fullness of Christ … "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

Some objections to saving faith

1. Does not this doctrine nullify personal holiness and good works? Personal holiness and good deeds can never merit salvation. If living moral lives saved then there was no need for Christ to come. Saving faith is by grace alone, but it

does produce holiness and good works in the believer as a result.
2. Does not this doctrine make void the law? The New Testament reveals that the law could not bring salvation. It was impossible for any man to be made righteous through observing the law. The law finds its fulfilment in Christ, and it is His finished work on the cross that meets all the laws demands. Saving faith puts us in Christ. He enables us to live obediently unto God. In Christ, the law is not made void, it is fulfilled.
3. Does not this doctrine produce spiritual pride? It may in some, but they should not be set forth as the rule. Those who truly love God and understand His grace do not speak of themselves as being any better than the next person. “Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee” (Romans 11:18) … “Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:9). It is the gift of grace that brought salvation; we simply receive it by faith.
4. Does not this doctrine encourage sin? We do not receive salvation to continue in sin. A truly born-again person does not continue in sin, instead he desires to please God by living a sanctified life. Those who continue in sin have not the faith that saves.
5. Does not this doctrine drive people mad? There will always be those who think that good works merits salvation. They will drive themselves to desperation trying to feel right with God. Those who have faith also have a sound mind.

Conclusion

We must ever speak of this saving faith, for it strikes at the very root of all false doctrine. It is this faith that once drove popery out of our land, and it is this faith that can again bring revival. The enemy of our souls detests this doctrine. He hates and seeks to hinder all who preach it. Nevertheless, the doctrine of saving faith overcomes him at every point. Saving faith is our victory in and through Christ.
[This sermon was first preached by John Wesley on the 11th July 1738].

The Almost Christian

"Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" Acts 26:28.

Introduction

In every age there are those who will not go all of the way to Christ. They are almost persuaded to be Christians, but they falter at some point. Not only this, but the Church is full of almost Christians who have not gone all the way with Christ.

What is an Almost Christian?

The almost Christian knows that God's word is true, but will not commit himself to following it. He may live a good, moral, even religious life, and even go beyond others with regards to human compassion. His humanitarian spirit causes him to give to others that which he has need of.

He may hate all unrighteousness and sin in society to the point of protesting and petitioning against it, but does not recognise sin in his own life. In this he has a "form of godliness" but reveals that he does not have "the power thereof" (2 Timothy 3:5). He does not partake in those things forbidden by God; instead his life is conducted according to divine principles. He abstains from alcohol, does not party, and is not a glutton. So he may appear like a good, solid believer to those around him. Being good natured, he desires to live peaceably with everyone. He never thinks of being unkind to others, and certainly would never return evil for evil. He may pray stirring public prayers, but it is all part of the outward appearance of godliness, and such devotion is simply hypocrisy, since he enjoys the praise of men (John 12:43). Yes, the almost Christian is a hypocrite. This is not to say that he does not have a sincere desire to please God, but he usually settles for the pretence instead of the real thing. He does not think that he needs to be born again; he is a good enough Christian as he is.

Is it possible to go so far and still only be an almost Christian? We are all aware of those who profess to be Christians and yet totally refuse to be faithful to the Lord. They love to be seen as Christian people, but they will not "lay hold on eternal life" (1 Timothy 6:19). They try to live in the world as well as the Kingdom of God. They will not make a commitment and are lukewarm towards God (Revelation 3:16). The almost Christian may love God, but not with all his heart, soul and might (Deuteronomy 6:5).

What is an Altogether Christian?

To begin with, an altogether Christian is someone who loves God with his whole heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30). This love consumes all of his affections, and he has a constant desire to rejoice in God his Saviour (Luke 1:47). From deep within he cries out, “Whom have I in Heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee” (Psalm 73:25). The world has no control over his life, for he is crucified to the world, and the world crucified to him (Galatians 6:14). His life and mouth proclaim, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

Secondly, he has true Christian love towards his neighbour … “Love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 19:19). This love is not restricted to a few close friends, but extends even to his enemies and those who persecute him. Because this love is not puffed up [proud and self-serving] (1 Corinthians 13:4) he is willing to be a servant to all, for this kind of love “seeketh not her own” (1 Corinthians 13:5). Such love is not easily provoked, does not entertain evil thoughts towards others, and is willing to forgive any wrongs done to it.

Thirdly, an altogether Christian has true faith. This is the foundation of his Christian life, because everyone who believes is born of God (1 John 5:1). It is impossible to be a Christian without being born again. Those who do put their faith solely in Christ for salvation become the children of God … “Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God … For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 1:13, 3:17). Therefore an altogether Christian enters into eternal life through faith and repentance. The sign of a true Christian is a life of holiness and righteousness (Hebrews 12:14). Anything else is simply dead and devilish, since Satan, though believing, does not have the nature of true Christian faith (James 2:19).

Lastly, the altogether Christian knows that his sins are forgiven, and is delivered from damnation through the blood of Jesus Christ. He knows that his new life is given upon the merits of Christ rather than of self, thus his confidence is in God alone. He lives a godly life by the power of God.

Conclusion

The question must be asked, “What kind of Christian am I?” Am I almost or altogether Christian? Am I a hypocrite pretending to be a Christian? Do I only live by the form (outward appearance) of godliness? The ultimate question is,

“Am I willing to be obedient to all that God requires of me as a believer?” If we are honest with ourselves, many of us are not even close to being almost Christians let alone altogether Christians. We have never laid down our lives as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1). We think that it is enough to go by the name of Christ, doing a few good works here or there, and attending church occasionally, but we continue to fall far short of God’s standard.

We must get back to believing that Christ alone saves our souls from sin, and gives us the power to live godly lives (John 15:5). His Holy Spirit must bear witness with our spirit that we are truly children of God (Romans 8:16). Those who die without being altogether Christians damn their own souls. Let us awake from sleep (self-deception) and call upon the Lord (Romans 13:11; 1 Corinthians 15:34). Do not rest until you can say, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). Pray and do not faint (Luke 18:1).

God knows those who truly love Him. May we all experience what it is to be, not an almost, but an altogether Christian. That we might know what it is to be justified, have God’s peace, and sealed with the Holy Spirit.

[Preached by John Wesley 25 July 1741].

Awake Thou that Sleepest

Ephesians 5:14

Introduction

In our text this week Paul writes, “Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” The church of this age, just like that of Paul’s, has multitudes of believers who are spiritually asleep. Only those Christians who are conscious, attentive, and obedient can be used by the Lord to further His work. The apostle also speaks to those who have never come to Christ for salvation. It is time to awaken out of sleep.

Who are the sleepers?

Those who are spiritually asleep remain in the natural state and are controlled by the flesh. In fact, they are consumed by the darkness of this world and are under the dominion of the devil. Being asleep they do not know that they are fallen and depraved sinners. They do not see the need to be born again from above. They sleep in the arms of the world, tightly bound up by Satan and are destined for Hell. The sleeper is satisfied with living in sin, depravity and worldliness. He certainly has no desire to flee from the wrath to come (Matthew 3:7). They will never ask, “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30).

There are sleepers to be found in the church too. They may profess Christ as Saviour, but there is very little sign of it in their lives. Such people usually feel uncomfortable amongst those who truly love the Lord. They will as much as possible avoid true Christian fellowship. The sleeper may even detest and ridicule those who are determined to live the Christian live by following Christ. The sleeper tries to comfort his heart with the notion that he is not as bad as others, and at least he goes to church once in a while. In fact such people are no better than those who are not believers, for both are spiritually asleep and overcome by darkness. It does not matter how high a position the sleeper holds in church, he is an abomination to God. The Lord Jesus Christ calls them whitewashed sepulchres that appear outwardly spiritual but are really full of uncleanness (Matthew 23:27). They abide in death since they are “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). This means they have backslidden and have separated themselves from God. They get to the point where they no longer feel any emotion, remorse or conviction when the Word of God is preached. They no longer understand even the basics of spiritual matters. They continue to harden their hearts and resist the Holy Spirit.

Wake up Sleeper!

It is time to wake up or perish! (Romans 13:11). Those who remain in sleep will taste God's wrath. This is true for the unsaved and those who claim to be born again. Awake, do not rest until you are saved. Realise that you sleep in the arms of Satan if you do not walk in Christ. Awaken from the false dreams of happiness and contentment in this world. Do you not know that an eternity of happiness and blessing awaits you?

Do you think you will stand uncondemned in God's presence in your present condition? Are you clothed upon with Christ? (2 Corinthians 5:2). Is there any oil left in your lamps? (Matthew 25:1-13). Are you truly a new creation in Christ Jesus? (2 Corinthians 5:17). Have you received the enabling power of the Holy Spirit that affects an inward change? If these questions offend you, it surely means that you do not belong to Christ.

Your clean living and reputation will not save you from God's wrath. Salvation is by faith only, so return to faith in Him. You must live godly in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:12). Are you willing to hear His voice while you still have time? (Hebrews 3:7).

The Promise to those who wake up

If you arise out of worldliness you will receive God's light in your soul. He gives grace and glory to those who follow Christ (Psalm 84:11). The Sun of Righteous is able to heal your soul (Malachi 4:2). God is Light and will turn your darkness into morning (1 John 1:5). If you are spiritually dry then He promises to pour His life-giving flood upon you (Isaiah 44:3). God is mighty to save, forgive, justify and empower. We know that these things are true, for it is not possible to receive Christ and not experience such blessings. His glory is available to all who will believe.

Conclusion

We all have to make a choice. It is between God and this world. Onlookers criticise if you decide to commit your life to Christ. They may say you have become too religious. The fact remains, we must go all the way with Christ. We are meant to be the light and the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13-16) instead of living in its darkness. We must not wait until God awakens us in His wrath. It is high time to wake up from spiritual sleep. We must allow the light of His countenance to make us whole. The God of our salvation wants to fill our lives with His presence.

Preached by Charles Wesley (brother of John) 4 April 1742.

Scriptural Christianity

"And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 4:31)

Introduction

We can find the same expression in Acts 2:1-6, but in Acts 4 the believers are found praying and praising prior to the Holy Spirit coming upon them. In this instance there is no mention of speaking in tongues. The important thing here is not how many of the special gifts were in operation, but the fact that they were all filled with the Holy Spirit of God. It is likely that they received the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-24), no doubt they were endued with faith, and it is certain that they received the power to live the crucified life. "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost" should teach us something about what it means to be a Christian. Is it a set of principles or a system of doctrine? No, instead it is the power of a changed life and heart in the follower of Jesus Christ.

How Scriptural Christianity begins in a person

It begins when he or she responds to the preaching of God's word. This means that there is conviction of sin, repentance, and a turning to Christ for salvation. Such a person proclaims that his life has been given over to Christ (Galatians 2:20). Here acknowledgement is made that salvation only comes through the cross of Christ as an unmerited gift of God. Conviction of sin is now replaced with the conviction that he is a child of God (Romans 5:1). The fear of death and hell is destroyed (Philippians 1:23). The person who has Scriptural Christianity cannot fail to praise God for eternal life and the everlasting blessings he will receive from God's hands.

There has to be evidence of the love of God in his life, meaning that Christ is the desire of his eyes and the joy of his heart. This love must include love for those around him too (1 John 4:11). Therefore he loves his enemies, the unthankful and the downright evil for the Master's sake. This kind of love is not "puffed up," but is instead meek, longsuffering, and forgiving even to the point of self-abasement (1 Corinthians 13). Such love does not seek his neighbour's hurt through action or words.

A Scriptural Christian can do nothing without Christ, and is in constant need of His grace and strength to meet each hour. His soul searches for ways to do good to others, thus he walks as Jesus walked. We can do no better than following His steps, though it often requires the denial of the flesh (Matthew 25:40). This kind of Christianity was recognised by the Jews and pagans at the rise of the Church.

How Scriptural Christianity spreads

It spread from one individual to another until it made its way around the world. It needs just one person to truly get filled with the Holy Spirit and to shine the light of the Gospel (Matthew 5:13-16). The early church was concerned about the lost by calling them to repentance (Acts 17:30). They endeavoured to win the backslider back to Christ. They laboured to do as much good as possible (Galatians 6:10). They warned the unrepentant and hard of heart about the coming judgement (Acts 24:25). At times the early church boldly thundered the word of God into the ears of sleeping hearts, demanding that they awake and arise (Ephesians 5:14).

The truth grew rapidly despite the fact that the believers were persecuted and oppressed. Yes, some fell away because of such affliction, but those with true faith in their hearts continued on. They were lied about, beaten, imprisoned and killed for their testimony of Christ, but rather than being destroyed by the world, they turned it upside down (Acts 17:6). The very foundations of hell were shaken by the early church as sinners turned from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

As the truth spread so too did the tares grow amongst the wheat. The devil began to place counterfeits in the church to destroy it from the inside, but nevertheless, he can never prevail against Scriptural Christianity (Matthew 16:18).

Scriptural Christianity is destined to fill the earth

One day God's true church will prevail and cover the earth. When the Lord establishes His millennial reign the whole of humanity will know what Scriptural Christianity is (Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:6-9). This of course cannot happen until the Jews acknowledge Christ as their Messiah at His coming (Romans 11). What a perfect world it will then be! No more evil, wickedness or sin. Never an unkind word will be spoken again, but all will love and serve the Lord.

Conclusion

Does this kind of Christianity exist today? Each of us need to ask, "Am I so filled with the Holy Spirit that there is no doubting that I am a Scriptural Christian?" Too many in the church think that this does not apply to them personally. If they are truly members of the body of Christ it emphatically does. If we are filled with the Holy Spirit then surely we should be living as true Christians. We should be bearing the genuine fruit of the Spirit. Our lives should

be holy and blameless. Our hearts should be wholly with God, full of zeal, and have a desire to spread His word.

Being filled with the Spirit God has given us the ability to do all we can to live for pure Christianity and to bring the lost to Christ. It all comes down to this: Do we have the form or power of godliness? It is time for Scriptural Christianity to be restored both in the church and in the world. We are all responsible for working with God to make this happen. It is not too late, for all things are possible with God.

Preached by John Wesley 24 August 1744.

Justification by Faith

"But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" Romans 4:5.

Introduction

How a sinner is justified by God is of vital importance to every man. It is the foundation of our hope as there can be no eternal life without it. This justification is the needed peace for condemned hearts and souls. Much confusion has come about regarding justification, yet without it it is impossible to be accepted by God. In this study we will find out what the Scriptures actually teach regarding justification by faith.

What is the foundation for justification?

God created man in His image to live in purity, holiness, love, and perfection. He gave man a perfect law to enable him to live in obedience to His word. All man had to do was to obey one simple command … "Do not eat of the tree" (Genesis 2:17). Obedience would mean that man could live forever in Paradise, but he chose to listen to Satan rather than God. At that very moment became separated from God, and so spiritually died. His physical body began to decay, and his spirit was destined to eternal death in Hell.

Through Adam sin entered the world, bringing with it God's punishment for it … "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12). Thus we are all born sinners as we enter this world through natural birth. This is the reason why God sent His only begotten son into the world to bear our sins, take our punishment, and taste death for us all (John 3:16; Hebrews 2:9). Christ's sacrificial death on the cross satisfied the requirements of the law of God, and it is only through Him that a man can be reconciled to God. This reconciliation happens the moment our transgressions are removed (Romans 5:18 … "Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.") We see then that Adam represents us all with regards to sin, but Jesus Christ represents us for justification … "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24). His blood alone is the foundation of justification by faith.

What is justification?

Justification is not the same as sanctification. Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life, but justification is the free gift (as part of salvation) through the finished work of God's Son. Nor is it the removal of Satan's accusations against us, for he will continue to accuse believers throughout their lifetime (Revelation 12:10). It is simply means that the repentant sinner is cleared of all accusations levelled at him by the law. Whereas the law would condemn us to Hell, God, through Jesus Christ, frees us from the curse of the law … "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Galatians 3:13). This does not imply that God overlooks our sinfulness, but He does pardon us, that is, forgiving us our sins through Christ.

Justification is a direct act of God upon the sinner who comes to Christ by faith for salvation … "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered" (Romans 4:7). Justification is therefore having our sins covered and removed by the blood of Christ.

Who can be justified?

The answer to this question is very simple. It is the 'ungodly' who can be justified by faith … "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Romans 4:5). It is not the self-righteous, but those who acknowledge their sin who receive justification and forgiveness.

Some teach that one must be sanctified before he can be justified, but this contradicts the plain teaching of Scripture. God justifies the ungodly not the godly. This false teaching is like saying that the Good Shepherd seeks and saves those who are found. No, He came to save the lost (Luke 19:10).

Those who realise their sinfulness and need of the Saviour; those who are tired of iniquity and wickedness, they are the only candidates for justification. A bad man may do good deeds, but these can never save or justify him before God. Both the tree and its fruit is diseased from birth. He must come to Christ, and come through Christ, before he can be accepted by God.

How is a man justified?

Justification is by faith (Romans 4:5), because he who believes is no longer under condemnation, but has received eternal life … "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath

everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24) … "We know that we have passed from death unto life" (1 John 3:14). Therefore the means of justification must be faith in Christ … God is "the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). This faith is the conviction that Christ truly is the Saviour and the only one who can remove sin through His finished work on Calvary. This faith implies that the sinner must consciously repent of sin and turn to God. This is the faith that brings justification to the soul.

Faith is the only condition for justification. The very moment a sinner believes he is reconciled to God. Without this faith he remains ungodly and doomed to destruction. Such faith is the exact opposite of self-righteousness and pride. The sinner must humble himself before God by acknowledging his worthlessness and sinfulness. He must see that he is a vile, worthless sinner without Christ. Only then can justification come upon him.

Conclusion

Justification by faith comes as a man commits his life fully to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). It cannot come through good works, reputation, or righteous living … "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Galatians 2:16). God justifies the ungodly that come to Christ by faith alone.

Preached by John Wesley 6 October 1739.

Righteousness by Faith

"For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach" Romans 10:5-8.

Introduction

Rather than rejecting the Law, Paul here upholds the very words spoken by Moses in Deuteronomy 30:11-12. The difference is simply that the Mosaic Covenant was based upon laws, but Christ's Covenant is of grace. Obedience to the law meant that a person had to work to please God. Grace, on the other hand, is God's free, unmerited gift. To this day the Jews remain under the law and are ignorant of God's righteousness … "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Romans 10:1-3).

The law says, "Do this, and live," but grace says, "Believe, and live." But how many Christians are still trying to be accepted by God through works? They will not submit themselves to the righteousness of God. In this sermon will are going to investigate the difference between the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of faith.

The righteousness of the law (Romans 10:5)

The law demands obedience down to the smallest detail. Without this no man can be accepted by God. It demands that he must be holy in every possible way, and all man's duties must be performed to perfection. This means that not the slightest failure was tolerated. This failure (sin) automatically makes him the enemy of God, and there was no way of recovery. Thus it is impossible to live a sinless and perfect life. No human being would ever be able to seamlessly keep the whole law. The law itself is righteous, but it cannot offer salvation to anyone.

The righteousness of faith (Romans 10:6-8)

This is the New Covenant established with sinful man through Jesus Christ. It is not a matter of doing but believing. This is the message of the Gospel of salvation. If righteousness came through obedience to the law, then none of the benefits of Christ avail for us. Observance of the law mocks human weakness. The grace of God does not require us to do anything but simply believe … "And he [Abram] believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6) … "Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:23-25). Thus salvation is offered through one means only … "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

God imputes righteousness upon the one who simply exercises faith in Christ Jesus. Upon believing he is delivered from the curse and the requirements of the law. This also means that the believer is freed from condemnation and guilt. The law could never make a man right with God, but grace and faith can. This grace is available to all who hear and believe in the word of God … "And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2).

The foolishness of trusting in the law for righteousness

Living according to the law is going in the wrong spiritual direction. It is to remain in sin without any chance of forgiveness and salvation. It is to remain the enemy of God, and to live under the curse of the law.

Those who even try to live according to the law are determined to establish their own righteousness. This is in fact what the law requires, that is, to prove oneself to be holy. Attempting to be righteous through the law reveals the desire to commend oneself before God by pointing to good deeds and acts of obedience. Such a one can never be proclaimed righteous before the Judgement Seat of the Holy God … "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight" (Romans 3:20). The result of trying to redeem or cleanse ourselves is eternal damnation.

The wisdom of accepting righteousness by faith

True believers acknowledge that they are unworthy and sinful without Christ. There is the realisation that we deserve nothing but Hell, for none of us are righteous of ourselves. We understand that no act of the flesh can ever merit God's favour, even less salvation. We know that we have been reconciled to God

simply because we exercised faith in Jesus Christ. This righteousness comes by God's free, unmerited love for those believe in Christ's sacrificial death upon the cross. Such a free gift ought to be accepted without any argument or doubt on our part. It should be received with joy and thanksgiving, for it is the only means that God uses to save sinners.

Do you desire to be right with God?

If your answer is 'yes', then do not go about trying to conquer your sin. Do not attempt to cleanse yourself before approaching the Holy God. Try and you will fail miserably. Do not try to please God by good deeds, church-going, and prayers. Instead, seek His righteousness by faith, in other words, simply believe what the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished on your behalf on the cross. Remember, you will never be good enough because you are incapable of doing anything truly good for God. Only the precious blood of Christ washes away sin and makes the soul righteous before God. Ask Him and He will make you whiter than snow (Psalm 51:7). Along with Paul we should declare, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Conclusion

Righteous is not the product of 'doing' but 'believing' [faith]. The righteousness that comes by faith is instantly yours the moment you believe … "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 8:12; 10:17).

Preached by John Wesley 12 June 1742.

The Way to the Kingdom

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

Introduction

These words assist us in our understanding of what true religion is. The Lord Jesus Christ informs us of both the fact of the Kingdom, and how one may get there.

The nature of true religion

Here the Lord calls it 'The Kingdom of God.' The apostle Paul uses the same description in Romans 14:17 … "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." The Kingdom of God is not 'meat and drink,' meaning that a person is not saved by observing rituals and ceremonies. These are just outward forms of religion. True religion on the other hand is 'righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost' – or inward and heart religion. The religion of Christ is infinitely higher and immensely deeper than ceremonies. The most godless man can practice outward religion, but this is not true religion.

True religion does not consist of orthodoxy, right opinions, and doctrines. A man may hold to these and still not be a child of God. Why? Because his religion is not of the heart. The Lord requires more than this. Mark 12:30 reminds us, "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment," but also, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:31). On thee two statement hang the whole teaching of the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22:40). Such love is the fulfilling of the Law (Romans 13:10).

True religion implies that we should have real happiness and joy – "peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Peace and joy is the product of truly having Christ as our Saviour. All fear, and torment is cast out (1 John 4:18). The Holy Spirit works in us that calm, humble rejoicing in God through Christ Jesus. The Psalmist writes, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Psalm 32:1).

So we see that the Kingdom of God reigns in a true believer's heart. It is eternal life in the very nature of the believer … "this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John

17:3). The Kingdom is ‘at hand’ because it is made manifest in the lives of those who have turned to Christ for salvation.

The way to the Kingdom

“This is the way, walk ye in it” (Isaiah 30:21). A person who desires to enter the Kingdom must first repent and believe the word of God. This means that he must admit that he is a sinner of the most offensive kind. Corruption is found at every level of the sinner’s life, and he always acts and thinks contrary to God’s laws. Everything about him is perverse and distorted. Out of this root springs unbelief which asks, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice?” (Exodus 5:2). His whole desire is earthly, and he drinks from the bitter streams of vanity and pride. The Scriptures inform us that “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23) – that is, eternal death which the sinner deserves. Wrath and damnation is all he should expect at the end of his life.

How can such a one appease God? Through good works? No! He can never come to God through this means, since good works can not deliverer him from the sin rooted in his heart. What has any man wherewith he may pay God? Instead, all must come to God through repentance and faith.

Jesus clearly states, “Repent, and believe the gospel.” What is the gospel? Paul speaks of it in this fashion, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). He suffered and died in our place. He was “wounded for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53). It is these facts that the sinner must acknowledge to be absolutely true, for they are at the very foundation of the Gospel Message.

There can be no place for doubt regarding these truths. If there is belief, then the Kingdom of God immediately reigns in the heart, all sin is washed away, and there is ‘righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” Of course, such a faith is not simply a mental assent to Biblical truth. Devils remain devils no matter how much they know about Christ. True faith is full of confidence and reliance upon the merciful and loving God who has redeemed the sinner through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Do you believe these things? Does your spirit rejoice in God your Saviour (Luke 1:47)? Can you truly cry, “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15)? If you do believe then “The love of God is shed abroad” in your heart “by the Holy Ghost” (Romans 5:5). You love the brethren, and there is peace and joy in your heart. You live in holiness and righteousness. You are being changed from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18) because you have Christ’s image in you.

If you are a member of God’s Kingdom, that is, you have true religion, do not allow anyone or anything rob you of your crown. Hold fast, and follow Christ to the end. Remember, “It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Romans 8:34).

John Wesley preached this sermon 6 June 1742.

The First-fruits of the Spirit

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:1).

Introduction

The text from Romans 8 can only apply to true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. These are they that truly live according to the direction of the Holy Spirit. They are not under any condemnation because they have been saved through grace. They have the Holy Spirit rather than the spirit of this present age (world) … "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Corinthians 2:12). This text has been abused by many, but we must determine its true meaning.

They that are in Christ Jesus

Those that are "in" Christ do not try to maintain their own righteousness, instead they have the righteousness of God … "And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Philippians 3:9). They are assured that they have "redemption through His blood" (Ephesians 1:7) and are living in Him. This means that true believers do not walk after the dictates of the flesh or the world because they are persuaded to abide in Christ. Those who do abide in Him "sinneth not" (1 John 5:18). Therefore it is only by obeying the voice of the Holy Spirit that the Christian "shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16).

Those that are "in" Christ have "crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Galatians 5:24) and abstain from all known sin. By doing so they go on from victory to victory in Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57). They now walk after the Spirit in their hearts and lives, being led by Him into every holy desire until holiness consumes the soul. Such holiness is evident in the way they speak, for their speech is "seasoned with salt" (Colossians 4:6), and "corrupt communication" proceed from their lips (Ephesians 4:29).

Those that are "in" Christ do everything for the glory of God, and because the Holy Spirit is in them they possess the evidence (fruit) of such an indwelling … "fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Galatians 5:2-23).

No condemnation

The true believer has all of his past sin washed away in the blood of Jesus Christ. Because of this God will never hold the believer guilty for them. It is as though such sins had never been committed. The Christian knows Christ as “the propitiation” for his sins (1 John 4:10). Nor does the believer fear God’s wrath, since he knows that Christ paid the price for his salvation. By faith he can declare an “answer of a good conscience toward God” (1 Peter 3:21). Sometimes believers do lose sight of God’s mercy, and allow condemnation to darken their understanding. At such times it is vital to get a fresh vision of what Christ accomplished on the cross. It is the light of the finished work on Calvary which dispels spiritual darkness.

The true believer is not under condemnation for “inward sin”, by this I mean the nature of the flesh. Rather than allowing the sin nature to dominate them, they are guided by the Holy Spirit to victory over the flesh. Such believers are very conscious of the fact that the “heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9), yet flee to Christ instead of continuing in sin or temptation.

The true Christian is not condemned for sins of infirmity, that is, as long as they are repented of as soon as the realisation of their failure dawns on them. Sins of infirmity include those unintended and thoughtless words that hurt another person. Our thoughtless actions often offend those around us.

God sees every plan and scheme of the devil designed to affect the fall of true believers. This is the reason why He has given us His Holy Spirit to guide us through life and to bring us safely to Heaven. We must understand that God loves each and every one of His children, and has provided all means to keep them from condemnation.

Conclusion

There is no need for any believer to be fearful and of little faith. Our sins are forgiven in Christ, and none can “lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect” because “it is God that justifieth” (Romans 8:33). The sins you have committed since becoming a believer are dealt with through repentance. We need to remind ourselves that our “Redeemer liveth” (Job 19:25). It is needful to by “the faith of the Son of God” (Galatians 2:20), by doing so we shall disentangle ourselves from the power of sin … “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Galatians 5:1).

God has the power to “heal your backslidings” (Jeremiah 3:22). We still have an

“Advocate” (1 John 2:1) who “maketh intercession for us” (Romans 8:34), “For he is faithful that promised” (Hebrews 10:23). It is in our human nature to fall, but God has the might to uphold us by His Spirit … “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit” (Psalm 51:12).

We must simply accept this by faith. We are not under condemnation if we walk in the Spirit rather than the flesh. If we live according to the Spirit one day we will be “perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (James 1:4).

“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Preached by John Wesley 25 June 1745.

The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption

"For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15).

Introduction

The apostle Paul is writing to those who can truly cry, "Abba, Father." These are they who are no longer under bondage and fear. In fact, the spirit of bondage and fear is far removed from the loving Spirit of adoption, and those who have it cannot be called the children of God. We all remember the day when we were born again and felt all the fear disappear from our hearts and lives. We knew at that moment that we belonged to God. Yet many believers have allowed the spirit of fear to bring them into bondage again. The fear returned because they stopped living in grace and sought to justify themselves through rules, laws and good works.

In this message we will investigate the states of the natural man, the man under the law, and the man under grace.

The State of the Natural Man

Such a person is in a state of spiritual sleep, and he cannot discern between what is good and evil. Darkness covers his understanding so that he has no inlets for the light of God's word. He knows next to nothing about God, and is unconcerned about this shortcoming. He sees no danger to his soul, not realising that he stands on the edge of the pit. He is so senseless that he does not even have the ability to fear.

There are those in the natural state, who acknowledge their sin, but think that they can rely upon God's mercy without repentance to get them to Heaven. They fail to recognise that a Holy God hates sin, and prove that they have no real love for Him else they would repent.

There are others in the natural state who talk about repenting before they die, thinking that God will permit them such an opportunity. If they truly loved God they would not put off getting right with Him without delay.

Those who have the greatest ignorance of God are those we call 'men of learning.' They boast of their faculties and achievements, and consider that their minds are open to spiritual truth, but the "light of the glorious gospel of Christ" has never shined upon them (2 Corinthians 4:4). They may congratulate themselves on personal wisdom, yet they are bent on discrediting and disbelieving the plain teaching of Scripture on almost every issue. They indeed

have wisdom, but not that pure “wisdom that cometh from above” (James 3:17). All such people are the servants of sin and are therefore, according to God, in spiritual bondage. How can they be convinced of their sinful state? First they must be brought to the place where they fear God and His law.

The State of the Man under the Law

God’s word is able to stir the one who is spiritually asleep and to awaken him to the danger he are in. To a certain degree the eyes of his understanding is opened by God so that he might see his true state. He then sees the reality of his sinfulness, the fiery damnation that awaits him, and also the saving power of a loving and merciful God.

This person soon realises that he is guilty of breaking God’s law, and has continually refused to be a true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. It dawns upon him that all of his religious ideas are simply “fig leaves” and “filthy rages” (Genesis 3:7; Isaiah 64:6), that is, hypocrisy and pretence. So a true fear of God settles in his heart when he acknowledges that God has every right to plunge both body and soul into Hell.

Such a person must not attempt to reform his life to get right with God; if he tries he is sure to find himself at a far deeper level of bondage. Those who desire to flee from sin must fly to the only Saviour of his soul (Romans 7:24-8:1). The law of God is working in his heart to reveal his sinfulness and to point him to Christ. This is a healthy fear of God, but it is not the Lord’s will for him to remain in the “spirit of fear and bondage,” instead He wants him to have the “Spirit of adoption.”

The State of the Man under Grace

Those who come to Christ are no longer under the law but under grace, and have truly received the “Spirit of adoption.” The child of God knows the full reality of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, and by faith, rejoices that all of his sins are washed away. Because of his faith in the Lamb of God all fear, guilt and condemnation depart. He can say, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). This means that there is absolutely no need to fear the wrath of God upon a fallen world. He no longer looks upon God as an angry Judge, now he knows Him to be a loving Father. He has no fear of going to Hell because he knows that, as a child of God, he is destined for Heaven. He knows that at the point of death he goes directly to Him who paid the price for his salvation.

Scripture tells us, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Corinthians 3:17). God always frees His own from the yoke of bondage by setting them free from servitude to sin by and making them the servants of righteousness (Romans 6). The true believer now has “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1), and can joyfully cry “Abba, Father.” All he wants to do is please and obey God, and aims to be more than conqueror through Christ (Romans 8:37).

Conclusion

A person may be sincere in each of these states, but only he who has committed his life to God has the “Spirit of adoption.” Each person must ask, “Do I really love God or am I just pretending to do so?” Remember that “he that committeth sin is of the devil” (1 John 3:8). So who will you serve today? Jesus Christ came to deliver you from Satan’s grasp (1 John 3:8), so it is Him you must turn to. If you do you will be born again.

Preached by John Wesley 7 October 1734.

The Witness of the Spirit

"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:16).

Introduction

Many have mistaken the voice of their own imagination for the witness of the Holy Spirit and have fallen into countless errors leading to damnation. They considered themselves to be the servants of God, but in fact they were all the while doing the works of the devil. It is extremely difficult to bring such people to see they are not truly the children of God.

There are those who go to the other extreme and will not allow the Holy Spirit to speak in or through them. The fear of becoming fanatics has made them deaf to the voice of the Spirit. This is evident in those who declare that the Gifts of the Holy Spirit ceased at the close of the Apostolic age.

It is important for us to know what the Scriptures actually say regarding the witness of the Spirit.

The witness of our own spirit

The Holy Spirit convinces us that we are truly the children of God so that we can cry, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15), but it is also our duty to believe all that the Scriptures teach regarding this same fact. The word of God describes to us the marks of the child of God, and by applying them we recognise our position in Christ. If we are "led by the Spirit of God" (Romans 8:14) then we can proclaim ourselves to be His children. Everyone who obeys His word (1 John 2:3,5), walks in righteousness (1 John 2:29), loves others (1 John 3:14) is a child of God. We can assure our hearts that we are born again if these reign in us … "And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him" (1 John 3:19). Such assurance comes from the Holy Spirit … "And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us" (1 John 3:24; 4:13). The believer should be overwhelmed with the desire to more like Christ in thought, word and deed.

The witness of God's Spirit

How does the Holy Spirit actually convince us that we are the children of God? Before we can be conscious of this fact we must aim to be holy in all aspects of

our lives, we must truly love God, and we ought to be going on to perfection in Christ. Alongside this there must be a love for others also. Paul tells us that we can “know the things that are freely given to us of God” (1 Corinthians 2:12). Where there is true love for God in the heart of a person, then the Holy Spirit will add that faith which encourages him to accept “the Spirit of adoption” (Romans 8:15), that is, he will never doubt that he belongs to God. He will delight and rejoice in the Lord for such wonderful salvation.

What about presumption?

The believer does not want to deceive his own heart with delusions from the devil. Many doubting, ungodly and disobedient people adhere to the notion that they are God’s children despite their wickedness. How can we then discern between what is the witness of the Spirit and presumption?

a) The natural mind puffs itself up by flattering itself. Such a person will think of himself as better, morally and spiritually, than others.

b) The natural mind disregards the plain teaching of God’s word. He thinks that it is possible to be a Christian without obeying the Scriptures.

c) The natural mind always gravitates towards the worldly rather than the heavenly (spiritual). The world with its opinions and fashions dominate his view.

d) The natural mind never changes. There is no evidence that any inward or outward change has taken place in his life since he professed Christ as Saviour.

e) The natural mind will not receive reproof. He ignores and rejects any attempt by concerned Christians to point him to Christ. He angrily opposes those who show him his error.

f) The born again believer presumes nothing, but simply believes that Jesus Christ delivered him from sin and damnation (Ephesians 2). He would never say that he was born a Christian, but needed to be born again by accepting Christ as Saviour.

g) The born again believer wants to love Christ more through obedience to His word … “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me” (John 14:21). A presumptuous pretender would never do this.

h) The born again believer knows the difference between the witness of the Spirit and presumption as simply as a sighted man can distinguish between night and day. His spiritual senses are rightly exercised (Hebrews 5:14). He has the inward and outward evidence of the fruit of the Spirit working in his life [love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 5:9)]. The Lord Jesus Christ says, “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:16).

i) The born again believer hates sin, and brings his flesh to the obedience of Christ.

Conclusion

It is only right that we should declare ourselves to be the children of God. It is only right that we should rejoice and be thankful for this unspeakable gift. We must remember though, that it should not just be our lips but our whole spirit, soul and body that offers such praise.

If we have such a hope (faith) then we should purify ourselves from “all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1), and “present [our] bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is [our] reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

Preached by John Wesley 11 August 1753.

The Witness of Our Own Spirit

"For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world" (2 Corinthians 1:12).

Introduction

Such is the voice of every true believer in Christ, so long as he abides in faith and love. "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness" (John 8:12) says the Lord Jesus, thus those who have the light rejoice in it. The exhortation to "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4) is part of the Christians daily life. In this message we will endeavour to understand the nature of the Christian's joy by weighing the words written by the apostle Paul in our text.

Conscience

God has made us thinking beings. We are able to perceive the present and reflect upon the past. We are conscious of our thoughts and actions. As conscious beings we have inward perception relating to our own character and behaviour, but the word "conscience" means much more than this. Its main business is to excuse, accuse, approve, disapprove, acquit or condemn us. Some have termed this "moral sense." God has implanted in every soul the power to know what is right or wrong in its own life, behaviour, character and thoughts.

The unsaved are able to judge between right and wrong by "the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another" (Romans 2:14-15), but the believer's rule is the Word of God, the writings of Holy Scripture which were "given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). It is a lamp to his feet and a light to his path (Psalm 119:105), therefore he lives, and has his conscious guided by the plain teachings of the Bible. Only then can he have "the answer of a good conscience toward God" (1 Peter 3:21) and "a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16). A true knowledge of ourselves is also required to have a good conscience. By making the Word of God our rule we have a standard to compare our thoughts, actions, speech and behaviour with. This means that w must agree with God's Word.

To have a good conscience we must lay the right foundation. Our foundation should always be Jesus Christ Himself … "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11). It is by a living faith

that this foundation is built upon. Faith alone is our evidence that we know we are living in agreement with God's holy and perfect word.
Just as a diseased tree cannot produce healthy fruit, so a healthy tree cannot produce diseased fruit. The heart of a true believer is thoroughly conformed to the rule of God's commandments. Because of this his conscience is clear before God.

Conversation

This word takes in every inward and outward circumstance of our lives. It includes the motions of our heart, tongue, hands and other bodily members. It extends to all of our faculties. Purity of life applies just as much to our dealings with the unsaved as with God's people. If we do not live right how do we ever hope to deliver them from the snare of the devil? (2 Timothy 2:26). The Lord Jesus Christ tells us that our eye should be "single", and that the light of the body is the eye (Matthew 6:22). Our entire lives will be filled with the light of God if we aim to live disciplined and holy lives.

Simplicity and godly sincerity

This means that our mind must be fixed upon God alone. Just one simple rule to live by so that we can enjoy the exceeding great reward of eternity. The single intention of promoting His glory and obeying His will should be the constant spring of all of our thoughts, desires and purposes.
"Simplicity" is the intention, but "godly sincerity" is the execution of it. Godly sincerity means that we are moving straight and continuously toward God by walking the highway of holiness, in the paths of justice, mercy and truth.

Fleshly wisdom

The opposite of simplicity and godly sincerity is "fleshly wisdom." Here Paul shows that we cannot live the Christian life according to natural understanding or popular practice. Our natural abilities cannot direct us in the right way, nor can religious upbringing bring us peace with God … "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Philippians 3:7-8). We "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22) and "Crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Galatians 5:24).

The grace of God

“The excellency of the knowledge of Christ” infers that we live “by the grace of God.” It is by the grace of God we are pardoned, forgiven and saved through Jesus Christ, but the term in 2 Corinthians 1:12 also implies the ‘power’ of the Holy Spirit who “worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). Now we can perform, through God, what to man is impossible. Now we can order our “conversation aright” (Psalm 50:23).

Testimony of our conscience

Once this is in place we have the true foundation of Christian joy. We then have that inward testimony which declares, “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour” (Luke 1:46-47). There is no doubt in our heart, soul and mind that we are members of the Kingdom of God, and truly His children.

Conclusion

Those who have such a witness in their spirit belong to God through Christ. Such a witness is the result of setting our “affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:2) by fixing their minds on Christ. They love God and rejoice in Him with “joy unspeakable” (1 Peter 1:8). A seared [calloused] conscience can never have this inward witness since it is void of spiritual understanding (1 Timothy 4:2). Those who have the witness in their spirit, that they are the children of God, live well-pleasing unto God … “Because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1 John 3:22).

Preached by John Wesley sometime in 1771.

The Means of Grace

"Ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them" (Malachi 3:7).

Introduction

We endeavour to show that Christ has ordained certain outward means for conveying His grace to the souls of men. By 'The Means of Grace' we do not refer to 'Saving Grace.' The apostolic church knew of these means and practiced them. The modern church has fallen short of what the early church was.

The Early Church as an example

"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common" (Acts 2:42-44). Here we see some aspects of the life of the first believers; they had love for God and men. But in the process of time, as the love of many waxed cold (Matthew 24:12), these outward works became religious duty. The church forgot that "the end of the commandment is charity [love] out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned" (1 Timothy 1:5).

Those who abused the ordinances of God brought a curse down upon them rather than a blessing. God raised up men to "stand in the gap" (Ezekiel 22:30) against the overflowings of ungodliness. These men sought to show that the outward show of religion and external worship is a lost labour, and that they were an abomination to the Lord. Outward religion had almost driven the religion of Christ out of the world, but these men of zeal recovered souls of delusion. It was soon thought that outward religion had no profit; this was a mistake, for it deprived the church of the ordinary means of conveying God's grace to the souls of men. Outward religion must proceed from the religion of the heart.

The Means of Grace

By 'means of grace' we refer to outward signs, words, or actions ordained by God to be ordinary channels whereby He might convey grace. The chief of these means is prayer, studying the Scriptures, and the Lord's Supper. Yet if we separate these from the reason for them, we are left with nothing but false

religion. True Christianity is then kept out of the heart by the very means which were ordained to keep it in.

Those who teach that there is grace and power in the means, simply by practicing them, are in great error. There is no inherent power in prayer, Bible reading, or the bread and wine. Such things can never atone for sin, only the blood of Christ can do that. There is no merit in anything or anyone but in Christ. Those who believe otherwise have a “form of godliness,” but do not have “the power thereof” (2 Timothy 3:5). Christ has never been revealed in their hearts, nor has the “love of God” been “shed abroad” in them (Romans 5:5). They reject the Scripture which teaches “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

How do we receive grace?

1. Through prayer. In His Sermon on the Mount the Lord Jesus Christ encourages to “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Matthew 7:7-8). Therefore, to receive from God, we should ask in prayer. God always gives “good things to them that ask him” (Matthew 7:11). In Luke 11:13 Jesus asks, “How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” He directs us to use this means to receive the blessing. What we ask should be always according to faith … “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering” (James 1:6).

2. We should also search the Scriptures. The Bereans did just this and found God’s grace (Acts 17:11-12). “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We should read, study and meditate upon the Word of God, and we “do well that [we] take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in [our] hearts” (2 Peter 1:19).

3. The Lord’s Supper is also a means of grace. When we partake of the bread and cup we remind ourselves of what it cost the Saviour to purchase our salvation (1 Corinthians 11:23-28). It is a sacred sign of the New Covenant, and by partaking of it we manifest our solemn remembrance of Christ’s death, until He comes again in the clouds. Do we not see that this cup is a “cup of blessing”? (1 Corinthians 10:16). Through this means God is able to convey all spiritual grace

to our souls.

Conclusion

God can bring His grace into our lives through the means revealed to us in Scripture. We should take care that we do not limit Him in any way. Along with Eli, we should say, “It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good” (1 Samuel 3:16). But remember, there is no power or merit in the means themselves. The mere practicing of them does not please God, so we cannot congratulate ourselves by thinking we have done some great thing. None of them are able to save the sinner from damnation. Those who have true faith can use the means to grow deeper in the grace of God. The means that God has ordained are for the refreshing of our souls in righteousness and true holiness.

Preached by John Wesley 22 June 1741.

The Circumcision of the Heart

"But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Romans 2:29).

Introduction

This is a difficult subject for the man who is alive unto the world but dead unto God. The whole of Scripture is a mystery to him until he is spiritually awakened. True believers are circumcised of heart, that is, are in a right state of spirit and mind before God.

What does circumcision of heart mean?

To put it in a nutshell, circumcision of the heart is 'holiness.' It implies being cleansed from sin … "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1). As a consequence, the believer has the virtues of Christ, and aims to fulfil the text which says, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

Humility

The circumcised of heart have humility. Humility is seeing what the flesh really is and capable of. It shows us that, even in our best estate, we are sinful and full of vanity. But for the Holy Spirit it would be impossible for us to think one good thought toward God. We do not have the sufficiency to help ourselves or to renew our souls in righteousness and holiness. Paul uses the term "lowliness of mind" (Philippians 2:3) when referring to humility, and encourages us to have Christ as our example … "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). The apostle Peter says much the same thing … "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). True humility is a product of following Christ.

Faith

The circumcised of heart have true faith. It is the faith that is "mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into

captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). All things are possible to such a believer because "the eyes" of his "understanding" has been "enlightened" (Ephesians 1:18). This faith has the assurance that Christ is truly Saviour and Lord, and is enabled to bear witness with these words … "I know that my Redeemer liveth" (Job 19:25) and "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Hope

The circumcised of heart have strong consolation through hope. This means that the testimony of their own spirit confirms that they belong to God … "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward" (2 Corinthians 1:12). The Holy Spirit works in them a clear and cheerful confidence that they are right with God. They are assured of the crown of glory in Heaven, and, by the mercy of God, preservation and blessing while they wait. This person knows that God gives strength for the race set before him, and power to be more than conqueror (Hebrews 12:1; Romans 8:37). He knows that affliction and hardship may come, but relies upon God to see him through them all.

Love

The circumcised of heart have godly love. This is the fulfilment of the royal law … "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself" (Luke 10:27). We are to cleave to the Lord and make Him our one desire, but it is not possible to love God if we detest others. This commandment should affect our every thought, word and deed.

A plain rule to live by

The distinguishing mark of those who are not circumcised is that they seek only that which gratifies the flesh. They will not allow the Lord to reign over them … "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).

If we do not continually feel that, without the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, we can do nothing to please God, then we are not right with Him. The one

who is circumcised of heart earnestly desires more of God each day.

If we are led by our senses, appetites and passions, then we are blind men walking in spiritual darkness. The circumcised of heart “look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen” (2 Corinthians 4:18). His faith in Christ governs all of his actions, conversations, desires and plans. Instead of walking by sight, he walks by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7). Instead of being led by the world, he is led by the Spirit of God (Romans 8:14).

We should rejoice in God for all He has done, knowing that there awaits us an “exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17). We should have that joyful assurance which accompanies true faith. It is wonderful to know that we have an “inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven” for us (1 Peter 1:4).

Conclusion

There will always be those who think they will obtain the promise without dealing faithfully with God. These blasphemers persuade themselves that they are guiltless. Such a vain hope! Every child of Adam must come by the “strait gate” (Matthew 7:13), “take up his cross” (Matthew 16:24), and be “sanctified” (1 Corinthians 6:11) to win the prize.

True circumcision of heart requires that we “present” our bodies as a “living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1). Such a sacrifice must be continuously offered upon the flames of holy love.

The Marks of the New Birth

"The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

Introduction

How is a person "born of the Spirit" – that is, born again? What does it mean to be a child of God? What are the privileges of being born again? We shall explain the marks of the new birth in the plainest of terms, just as they are found in Scripture.

Faith

Faith is the foundation for all the other marks of the new birth. Paul says, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26). Agreeing with this John writes, "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13).

This faith is not a mental assent to the teaching that "Jesus is the Christ" (1 John 5:1), such a faith, at its best, would be dead. True Christian faith is more than mental assent to Scriptural truth; it is a disposition which God has wrought in the heart. It is a sure confidence that, through Christ, we are forgiven and are reconciled to God. We do not have "confidence in the flesh" with its works of righteousness and religion (Philippians 3:3), but accept that Christ alone brought salvation.

A fruit of faith is victory over all outward sin. Sin should not have dominion over our faith in God, for "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 John 3:9, see Romans 6:14). It was for this very reason that Christ came to this world, "He was manifested to take away our sins" (1 John 3:5). Surely we are not born again if we continue in sin … "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous" (1 John 3:7).

Another fruit of living faith is peace with God … "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). This is the peace that "passeth all understanding" (Philippians 4:7).Such peace does not come by giving mere mental assent to Christ, instead only those who have a heart-faith in God know anything about it, for it is a peace the world

cannot give, and the world cannot take away. It is the peace of Christ Himself, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you” (John 14:27).

Hope

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3). Ours is not a dead and futile hope contained in ‘maybe’ and ‘perhaps,’ for such is false hope and is the enemy of God and man. Biblical hope implies that the witness of our own spirit (conscience) is in agreement with the witness of the Holy Spirit, that we “are the children of God” (Romans 8:16 and 2 Corinthians 1:12). This is because we have “received the Spirit of adoption” and can call God “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15). No matter what might happen to us in this life, we remain the children of God for eternity (Romans 8:33-39). The Comforter was given that we might have the fruit of Christian hope in this life – that is, joy, everlasting joy for all of life’s situations (see Galatians 5:22). Therefore we “rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:2). This living hope produces “joy unspeakable” (1 Peter 1:5).

Love

At the new birth “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost” (Romans 5:5). Love is the greatest mark of all because it displays our feelings toward God … “Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:6). It is to Him we continuously pray … “And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” (1 John 5:15). He is our delight and desire … “My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips” (Psalm 63:5). We love the Lord Jesus Christ since He alone paid the price for our salvation … “My beloved is mine, and I am his” (Songs of Solomon 2:16). True love for God is found in those that “keep his commandments” (1 John 5:3). Should we not obey Him whom we claim to love? Should we not be zealous, and hunger and thirst to please Him in every possible way?

A necessary fruit of this love for God is the love for our neighbour, not excepting even our enemies. We are to “love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength, and with all our mind; and our neighbour as ourselves” (Luke 10:27). The nature of this love is sacrificial … “Hereby

perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16). We know that we know God because of it, for "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren," which means that whoever "loveth not his brother abideth in death" (1 John 3:14). It is certain that mental assent cannot attain to such love as this.

Conclusion

God Himself describes the marks of the new birth with the plainest of language in the Scriptures. There is a question that remains to be asked though, "Who are we to deserve the privilege of being born of God? We know that it is not ours because we were baptised in water or through some religious duty. Many hypocrites, drunkards and gluttons have been baptised and remain as they were. Are they God's children? No, instead they are the offspring of Satan. Those who remain "dead in trespasses and sins" are not, by any stretch of the imagination, born again (Ephesians 2:1). A person must be born again before he can enter into the Kingdom of God (John 3:5). This blessing comes from God through Jesus Christ the moment we receive Him as Lord and Saviour … "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God" (John 1:12). Only they can rightly call God "Father," and have the confidence to declare themselves as children of God.

Preached by John Wesley 5 a.m. Friday 3 April 1741 at Epworth.

The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God

"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin" (1 John 3:9).

Introduction

While the new birth and justification are inseparable, they are in fact different in nature. Justification changes our outward relationship to God, that is, we are reconciled to Him. The new birth is a work that God does within us, meaning that His image is now in us. Justification takes away the guilt, but the new birth removes the power of sin. These two are joined together the instant we receive Christ, but we have to acknowledge their distinct natures. In this sermon we will seek to determine what "Whosoever is born of God" means, and the true sense of "doth not commit sin."

Whosoever is born of God

The moment we are born again a vast inward change occurs within us. We no longer want to live the way we did before. The circumstances of natural birth shed some light on the way we understand the spiritual.

An unborn child knows nothing of life outside of the womb. In a sense he is in darkness, and blind to the meaning of life. He has the signs of life, and has motion, but has no understanding of the material world or of self. It is as though a thick veil separates him from true discernment. Yet, as soon as he is born, he exists in quite a different manner. He now breathes the air, has awareness of self, and things and people around him. His understanding and discernment is gradually increased, and his bodily senses awakened. His eyes soon discover the light, and his ears are attentive to the torrent of new sounds. He begins to interact with the visible world.

So it is with those who are born again. Before the new birth we were insensible to God, and did not concern ourselves with His existence. Our eyes were closed, and our ears deaf to spiritual realities. We were surrounded with darkness on all sides, so that we could not discern "the things of the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:14.) A thick veil separated us from understanding the things of God. As soon as we were born again our entire existence changed! We became sensible of God … "Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me" (Psalm 139:5). We were immediately filled with the Spirit of God and began to breathe the air of Heaven. We received the faith to love, pray, praise

and worship God. Our spirits were awakened so that we might discern spiritual things. The eyes of our understanding were opened (Ephesians 1:18), and realised what great love and mercy God has shown to sinners. Our ears were then enabled to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd (John 10:4). Our spiritual senses began to know what “peace with God” is (Romans 5:1), and that God had shed His love abroad in our hearts (Romans 5:5).

Doth not commit sin

The one who has been born again, that is, received new life, and has exercised true faith toward God, does not continue in sin. In other words, he “doth not commit sin.” “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself” (1 John 5:18).

The sin we are referring to is all outward sin, meaning our voluntary transgressions of God’s law as revealed in the Scriptures. Those who truly love God cannot wilfully transgress any of God’s commands, either by speaking or acting what he knows the Lord has forbidden. He refrains from whatsoever is known as an abomination in the sight of God.

We know that it is possible for the children of God to commit gross sin, and that wilfully, by breaking the plain commandments of God. David, though displaying great faith and love for God, nevertheless allowed himself to commit evil deeds such as adultery and murder (2 Samuel 11). Barnabas, a man used mightily by the Holy Spirit and known as “the son of consolation,” became embittered against Paul concerning John Mark (Acts 4:36-37; 11:29-30; 13:1-4; 15:35,39). We read of Peter, the first of the apostles, playing the hypocrite amongst the Jews and Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-14). Each of these men fell into sin because they removed themselves from their steadfastness and faith in God. They did not “keep” themselves in the grace of God, but allowed evil desires or tempers to control them. Their spirits were now closed again as God was removed from the equation.

Notice how one progresses from grace to sin one step at a time: [1] Born again by the Spirit of God. [2] Temptation arises in the heart, be it fleshly or devilish in origin. [3] The Holy Spirit warns about the consequences of the sin. [4] The flesh crumbles, and the thought of the sin becomes tantalising. [5] The Holy Spirit is grieved; faith is weakened, and love for God grows cold. [6] The Holy Spirit sharply reproves him and calls him to remain on the right path. [7] The Holy Spirit is ignored as the voice of the desires is listened to. [8] The evil desire spread through the soul, and he is now capable of committing the worst of sin.

The born again believer keeps himself and cannot commit sin that is until he

surrenders himself by becoming entangled once more with the yoke of bondage (Galatians 5:1).

Conclusion

Loss of faith and commitment is the result of committing outward, wilful sin. We are all liable to temptation, particularly to the sin that so easily besets us (Hebrews 12:1), but it must be overcome by fixing our eyes upon God and His word. We sin when we are take the bait of our own desires … “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed” (James 1:14). We must continue to allow the Holy Spirit to work and minister in our souls, so that we might increase in love and awareness of God. We must offer up our thoughts, words, and deeds to Him as a holy sacrifice acceptable unto God in Christ Jesus (Romans 12:1). This implies that there must be a continuance of the divine life imparted to us at the new birth, for the Holy Spirit will not always strive, but will withdraw from us and leave us to our personal darkness (Genesis 6:3). Let us cast ourselves upon Him who saved our souls; let us continue in faith, love, studying His word, prayer and praise, for in doing so we’ll find that sin no longer dominates our lives (Romans 6:14).

Preached by John Wesley 23 September 1739.

Sermon on the Mount 1

"And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: and he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:1-4).

Introduction

Through the Sermon on the Mount, the Son of God is showing us the way to Heaven, the true way of life everlasting, and all the paths that lead to destruction. Every word He speaks is for our eternal good, for it is the Father's will for His children to be blessed.

Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

In the fifth chapter of Matthew the Lord lays out eight particulars which when applied guard against false religion. The very foundation of these particulars is Poverty of Spirit … "Blessed are the poor in spirit." This is not poverty on the materialistic level; instead Christ is speaking in terms of disposition of heart. This foundation is the first step to real joy, contentment and happiness in this life and in the next.

"Poor in spirit" does not refer to those who love poverty or who fear riches. This has always been the false notion of heretical religionists. They think that such voluntary or self-imposed poverty brings God's grace to the soul, and is a large step to the Kingdom of God. Yes, Paul does tell us that "the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10), but it is not the sole root, nor does his teaching carry the same application as being "poor in spirit." Poverty is not the remedy for covetousness or the love of money, for the poorest man can still lust after this world's goods. The phrase "poor in spirit" is found on the same branch as "purity of heart."

Who then are the poor in spirit? Surely it is they who know what they really are! They acknowledge themselves to be "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" without Christ (Revelation 3:17). They know that they have a bias towards the flesh, deserve God's wrath, and so often grieve His Holy Spirit. They realise that there is nothing they can give in exchange for their souls (Matthew 16:26), meaning that no amount of good deeds will ever merit eternal life. There is the awareness that it is impossible to obey God without the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit.

There is no human virtue in self-imposed humility. Some are proud of their

humility. The Lord's expression is quite a different kind of humility, for it speaks of total helplessness. In Romans chapter one, the apostle Paul makes it clear that the whole world is found to be guilty before God, and that only those who come to Him as helpless sinners may receive justification, forgiveness and salvation.

True Christianity begins where heathen morality ends. Poverty of spirit, conviction of sin, denial of self, and having Christ's imputed righteousness instead of our own is the fruit of pure religion. Followers of false religion have no understanding of these things. Pagan religion has always sought to establish its own righteousness through good works, but not so with Biblical Christianity.

Those who are poor in spirit have the Kingdom of Heaven opened up to them already, for they have the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8). They have "peace with God" (Romans 5:1, see also Philippians 4:19) and "joy in the Holy Ghost" (Romans 14:17). One day they will be crowned with the "crown of righteousness" (2 Timothy 4:8). This all comes by exercising faith in Christ and His finished work on Calvary. They are His faithful students and have learned of Him to be "lowly of heart" (Matthew 11:29). They may be poor in spirit, but they are indeed prosperous in the Kingdom of God.

Blessed are they that mourn

This sorrow is not the result of self-inflicted trouble, nor does it come from the loss of worldly fortunes. Some have afflicted their souls and have made a religious experience out of it, but the mourners spoken of by Christ are they who deeply yearn after God. These cry out to Him with words that cannot be expressed. They desire a deeper knowledge of God, and a fuller life in the Spirit.

Though they may endure physical sorrow in this world, they do not let it turn them from the true way, nor do they allow miserable comforters to coax them into giving up their faith in God. They are comforted by the Lord, and are blessed in their heart despite the discomfort of the flesh. The Saviour comforts them by giving them the "full assurance of faith" (Hebrews 10:22) which swallows up all doubt and tormenting fear. They are fully persuaded that nothing can separate them from the love of Christ (Romans 8:35-39).

This mourning will cease when it is lost in holy joy as we enter into the Kingdom of Heaven … "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). While we await such blessedness in Heaven, there are those who reject Christ and doom themselves to the eternal miseries of Hell. This indeed brings a deep seriousness upon our spirits, a seriousness which is increased as we see the lost careering towards the bottomless pit, never to be seen again. The true meaning of 'poverty of spirit' and 'mourning' is foolishness

to the world and false religion. The believer will always be considered as a fanatic and a lunatic to those who are lost in sin, yet we know that they stand on the very edge of destruction. It is our responsibility to warn them.

Conclusion

Those who “mourn in Zion” (Isaiah 61:3) must not allow themselves to be moved away from their faith in God, yes, even when we see the multitudes plummeting into Hell. Remember, we walk in spiritual reality rather than vain shadows. One day the “poor in spirit” and those who “mourn” will experience their Lord wiping away every tear from their eyes (Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 7:7:17, 21:4). Though a period of poverty and mourning may have to be endured in this life, the Lord will “give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” (Isaiah 61:3). One day we will enjoy the blessedness and riches of Christ in His eternal Kingdom.

21 June 1740.

Sermon on the Mount 2

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:5-7).

Introduction

In this message we will discuss three blessed states, which are: [1] Blessed are the meek; [2] Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness; [3] Blessed are the merciful.

Blessed are the meek

The meek are blessed for they shall inherit the earth. But who exactly are the meek? It is certainly not they who hide themselves because of timidity or inhibitions. The Lord said meekness rather than weakness would be blessed. Meekness does not include being unconcerned about others and every day life. That is not meekness but apathy. Nor does meekness mean a lack of zeal for God or the staying clear of troubles and excesses caused by others. Christian meekness does not undermine but balances the affections and the mind. Instead of producing fear it propagates true faith in Christ.

The meek have a calm confidence and assurance in God. They continually say, "It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good" (1 Samuel 3:18). The meek, though knowing the truth, may be persecuted for it, yet they remain "Zealous for his God" (Numbers 25:13). The meek are masters of their own selves and hold to the noblest of purposes. They control their temperament, anger, and desire. The meek are never found wanting in Christian love and mercy, but go beyond mere human compassion as they reach out to others around them. This Christ-like meekness even extends to every one of their enemies and persecutors.

That the meek "shall inherit the earth" seems to fly in the face of the wisdom of this world, but though the world may hate and war against the meek, they remain steadfast and sure. The meek conquer the earth without the need for armed aggression and fear, for they are motivated by the love of God. False religion has always used intimidation and force, whereas faith is the power the meek use to win the lost to Christ. These are they who will rule and reign with Christ throughout His Millennial Kingdom.

Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness

Only those who earnestly desire true righteousness will be filled with it. From righteousness springs up every holy temper, for it is found growing in the love of God. Hunger and thirst are the strongest of all our bodily appetites, and should be so in relation to our spiritual appetites also. We eat and drink, but do not stop doing so after a single meal; instead we want more on a daily basis or at regular intervals. Our craving for meat and drink, or any of this world's goods, is only a poor example of our appetite for Heavenly things.

It is not possible for a believer to fully satisfy his soul, as he yearns for the Living God, in this life, yet he is blessed in so doing. Some think that righteousness is living a moral life, being religious, and being charitable to one's neighbour, but the righteousness the saved long for goes far beyond this. The righteousness we speak of comes from being "joined unto the Lord in one spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:17), having "fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3), and walking "in the light, as he is in the light" (1 John 1:7).

Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will be filled with the very thing they long for, even with righteousness and true holiness. God will feed them with the bread from Heaven and with the water of life. They will be filled because they do not waste time and money searching for "that which is not bread" nor do they "labour for that which satisfieth not" (Isaiah 55:2). For them only pure religion, which is built upon the power of godliness, will suffice. Such righteousness and its blessing can only be found in Jesus Christ.

Blessed are the merciful

The merciful will be blessed with the mercy of God. Here 'mercy' implies compassion, tenderness and gentleness. The most important quality of mercy is 'brotherly love.' We may think that we are doing wonderful things for God, yet it is all meaningless if we do not possess Christ-like mercy.

Christian mercy overcomes evil with good, and it stands apart from all harshness and sourness of spirit. It is not bitter or vengeful; instead it desires to see all men blessed by God (see 1 Corinthians 13). The merciful truly love God, their neighbour and their enemies. True mercy is the opposite of a hateful and bitter spirit, for it springs from the love of God.

The merciful will obtain the mercy of God. They will be blessed in all their ways. Such mercy will be repaid a thousand times over in this life and in the

next. They will continually know of God’s rich mercy being bestowed upon them (Ephesians 2:4). As they walk in love, they will experience God’s love in every possible way.

Conclusion

The world will never be won to Christ through religion or military strength, even though some have used such methods in the past. The Jews, the Muslims, and the Heathen will never come until they see real Christianity being displayed in this world. The church has a great need of meekness, righteousness and mercy today. Each individual believer must lay down his life for Christ’s sake, and continually overflow with His love, or else we will never be effective witnesses (Romans 12:1; 1 John 3:16). The lost will not know Christ through opinions or circumstantial religion. It will take a wonderful manifestation of the true sons of God to accomplish that (Romans 8:19).

19 October 1739.

Sermon on the Mount 3

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matthew 5:8-12).

Introduction

It our duty to steadily look into the "perfect law of liberty" and to continue in it (James 1:25). In this law we have described three further aspects of the "blessed" life of the believer. In these verses the Lord Jesus Christ reveals something more about what Biblical Christianity really is. By avoiding or neglecting these teachings, a Christian does great disservice to his soul, and truly dishonours God. In this sermon we promote the pure religion of Jesus Christ.

Blessed are the Pure in Heart

Christian love is the "fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10) and "the end of the commandment" (1 Timothy 1:5). This love for God and our neighbour proceeds from purity of heart.

The "Pure in Heart" are those whose hearts have been purified through faith in the blood of Christ Jesus. They are purified from unholy affections and filthiness of the flesh and spirit by "perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1). They have the spirit of gentleness and meekness, and hunger and thirst after righteousness (Matthew 5:6).

The "Pure in Heart" shall see God. What a blessing this will be! God will bless them with the clearest communication of His Spirit as they proceed through this present life, the most intimate of "fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). He will cause His glory and countenance to shine upon them. The "Pure in Heart" do see God dealing with every aspect of their lives, and they see His hand over them for good. More especially they see Christ in the breaking of bread and in the time of prayer.

Blessed are the Peacemakers

Inward purity always produces outward holiness, thus peacemakers reveal

themselves to be the true children of God. The word “peacemakers” can only refer to believers who love God and hate strife and contention, but desire God’s mercy and grace to be poured out upon their brethren in Christ.

The peacemaker seeks to reconcile those who have allowed bitterness to divide them. Peacemakers are those who do “good unto all men” at every opportunity (Galatians 6:10), and endeavour to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). They rejoice when he has been offered the privilege to bless others with material things, and to assist them in their needs. The peacemaker is an instrument in God’s hand as he sows the seed of His Kingdom.

Peacemakers are truly the children of God, and are blessed because they have received “the Spirit of adoption” and they been made “joint heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:15; 8:17).

Blessed are the Persecuted

The Lord was well acquainted with human nature. He reveals that the “Pure in Heart” and the “Peacemakers” would be hated by the world. Paul teaches in Galatians 4:29 that those “born after the flesh” will persecute those who are “born after the Spirit.” In fact “all who will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). The apostle John adds, “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you” (1 John 3:13). This persecution and hatred is a result of the world rejecting Christ and Biblical Christianity … “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name’s sake, because they know not him that sent me” (John 15:18-21).

This persecution comes for righteousness sake, that is, because the believer lives according to God’s righteousness rather than by the standards of the world. The spirit of the world is continually in direct opposition to the Spirit which is of God. The leopard and the kid cannot lie down together in peace. The scandal of the cross has not ceased.

The believer is blessed despite the fact that the world reviles him for Christ’s sake. He is blessed because he does not retaliate, but rather overcomes evil with good. He rejoices because he is allowed to suffer for Christ, knowing that such “light afflictions, which are but for a moment, worketh for [them] a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17). The persecuted are in good company since the prophets were also abused and mistreated by the world and false religion.

Conclusion

These virtues describe Christianity in its native form as it was delivered by its Great Author. We may call the Genuine Religion of Jesus Christ. Those who oppose the “Pure in Heart”, the “Peacemakers”, and the persecuted, are found fighting against God Himself. These things are the foundations of Christianity, so let us avoid being hearers of the word only, but let us not rest until every line is transcribed in our hearts, until we be found holy and perfect as our “Heavenly Father is perfect” (James 1:22; 2 Timothy 1:9; Matthew 5:48).

26 August 1739.

Sermon on the Mount 4

"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:13-16).

Introduction

"The beauty of holiness" is the visible expression of God's likeness in the believer's life (Psalm 29:2). So many think that pure religion should be personal and not to be expressed, shared or spoken of in polite company, but such a notion comes from Satan rather than the Spirit of God. Our faith in Christ must be manifested and proclaimed so that the unsaved might call upon the name of the Lord. We are "the light of the world" drawing the lost to Christ.

Christianity is a Social Religion

To make Christianity a mere personal religion is to nullify its power. It is a religion that must be shared with the world. By 'social' we do not mean that Christianity should be compromised to make it palatable to the world, but that it must be presented so that the lost can see the light and be freed from sin. To grow, the Christian church has to communicate its beliefs to all men.

A branch of Christian practice is "good works." A believer ought to take every opportunity to do all the good he can, and thus affect the lives of those who do not as yet know Christ. This does not mean that we should interact with good men only, but we must do so to all regardless of their spiritual and moral standing. We must acquaint ourselves with the lost; otherwise we are of little use as believers. Paul says to those who would cut themselves off from the world, "Ye needs go out of the world" (1 Corinthians 5:10), in other words, 'You might as well be dead.' Nevertheless, it does not follow that we should be intimate with the unsaved, for in doing so many have fallen from grace and allowed sinners to transform them.

We cannot completely be separate from sinners, else how would we be "the salt of the earth"? Our holy character, words and works should influence others to come to Christ for salvation. In another sense, we should be a check to the corruption evident in society. This cannot be accomplished if we lock our faith in

our hearts. To hide it is to make it completely useless. No wonder Christianity is in such a dire state today! Therefore, we are called to bear fruit … “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit” (John 15:2). If we claim to know Christ as Saviour then we have the responsibility to tell others the good news and to live as saints in a fallen world.

It is not possible to conceal true Christianity

Can we not just live clean, moral lives without actually sharing our faith with the lost? If the truth offends the unsaved, is it not better to keep it to ourselves? What earthly good is that form of religion that does not promote Christ? As long as true faith abides in the heart, it is impossible to conceal it. To hide it is contrary to its Great Author. We are the “light of the world. A city that is set on a hill [that] cannot be hid.” It is a fact, our godly character and personal holiness will make us as conspicuous in society as the sun in the heavens. You may be a shy person, but there can be no fear about sharing your faith in Christ. Even the most timid of believers should walk in holiness, be zealous, and be noticed as a lover of God and men.

It is because the world loves “darkness rather than light,” and “because their deeds [are] evil” that they will not come to Christ (John 3:19). Our labour to “overcome evil with good” makes us extremely visible to the lost (Romans 12:21). This is the reason why many believers are singled out for persecution and ridicule. So, it is impossible to keep true Christianity hidden, unless of course we are backsliders and reprobates. Christians are as a “light that shineth in a dark place” (2 Peter 2:19), that guides a few poor sheep out of spiritual darkness unto the way of peace.

Conclusion

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” is the Lord’s will for every believer (Matthew 5:16). If we conceal it we will harm both ourselves and those whom the Lord is willing to save (2 Peter 3:9). If we refuse, then we will forego our reward in Heaven. The world must see our good works, our faith and our love for God. Some will respond to such a display of true Christianity and turn to Christ. They will go on to glorify our Heavenly Father. Are we ashamed to own our Lord? Are we willing to proclaim His name to this generation? Are we willing to live like believers? Our “labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

3 February 1747.

Sermon on the Mount 5

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17-20).

Introduction

Jesus Christ did not teach the novelties of a new religion, though those who rejected Him always claimed that He did. The religionists of that day had a "form of godliness, but [denied] the power thereof" (2 Timothy 3:5). They knew nothing of worshipping God "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24). Some think that He came to show man an easier way to Heaven, but such a view is groundless.

I am not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets

Yes, the ceremonial laws relating to sacrifices and service in the temple have been done away with. From Christ's sacrifice onwards there was no further need for ritualistic laws. Those who tried to make it part of Christianity were reprimanded by Peter, "Why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" (Acts 15:10). Jesus succeeded in "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross" (Colossians 2:14).

The moral law, enforced by the prophets, is what Christ is speaking of here. This law is encapsulated in the Ten Commandments. None of these laws are revoked in Biblical Christianity. Our human circumstances might change, but God's law never does.

The Lord fulfilled the law, by obeying it and teaching it. He declared that every part of it is true and that man is responsible for keeping it. Our religion is not new; it is that which God intended at the very beginning. It is as old as Creation, and proceeds from the time Adam "became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7). The law was added because man fell from grace, and the prophets declared its meaning.

Not one jot or tittle will pass from the Law

No matter how insignificant it might seem, nothing of the law can be disannulled. God's word of authority is applicable for all generations. The Gospel message is therefore no contradiction of the Law. Instead of passing away it establishes the Gospel as God's perfect plan for all men. The Law points man to the Gospel, while the Gospel leads him to a more exact fulfilling of the Law. Paul tells us that "the righteousness of the law [is] fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:4). This is in full agreement with God's intentions … "This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33).Therefore the Gospel has not superseded the commands of God.

Even the least commandment

There have always been those who teach that the Law has been done away with. They are not followers of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who do they think they are to argue with the Son of God? God's demand is entire obedience; therefore we cannot modify His word to suit our circumstances. There is no place for even a little transgression of the law. Do you really what to be "least in the Kingdom of Heaven"?

Yes, it is "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8), but that you can sidestep holiness on your way to Heaven. Those who obey and teach the law will be "great in the Kingdom of Heaven."

Righteousness that exceeds

If we are no better than the ungodly religious leaders of our day, then there is no hope for us. These men make a profession out of religion. They are zealous over things that don't matter, yet see no need to believe the truth. They are full of self-righteousness because they think their ceremonies and rituals amount to something with God. Jesus declared the religionists of that day to be a company of hypocrites, for they "Trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others" (Luke 18:9).

We should not measure ourselves by their standards and doctrines; instead we must live according to God's word. There is no place in Heaven for such as this.

No wonder the Lord requires that our righteousness exceed theirs. Our righteousness is that which comes by faith in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:22).

Conclusion

The religious practices and notions of others should mean nothing to the Bible-believing Christian. We do not have them, but Christ, as our example. It is our duty to know the word of God by searching the Scriptures and obeying His commands. Let us not be content to “keep the whole law, and offend in one point” (James 2:10), rather let us utterly abhor all false ways (Psalm 119:128). Remember, without Christ we can do nothing (John 15:5). Go higher and deeper than common religion by letting your religion be that of the heart. Be athirst for God, even the Living God, and long to have His likeness, and be satisfied with nothing else but that (Psalm 42:2; 84:2; 17:15).

15 May 1739.

Sermon on the Mount 6

"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:1-15).

Introduction

In the previous chapter the Lord described what inward religion, that is, genuine Christianity consists of. He explained it in terms of living in faith and holiness. Now He goes on to show how we might have all our actions and words made holy and good.

Acts of mercy

Everything we do and say, for the benefit of others, should come from the purest of intentions, rather than to bring glory and praise to ourselves. Others will obviously see some of our good deeds, but we desire that all the honour and praise go to God. The Lord will not reward us for what we do or say to receive the adulation of men.

The Lord Jesus warns us against blowing our own trumpet, so whatever good we do must be as secretly and as quietly as possible. God sees everything we do, and He will indeed openly bless us when we shine our light before men for His glory (Matthew 5:16). This reward might not always come to us on earth, but it is certain that we will be blessed in the general assembly of His people and His angels.

Acts of piety

Who do we desire to hear us when we pray, God or man? Hypocrites pray to be heard by otherS so that they might be thought of as pious persons. Prayer on the other hand is the lifting up of the heart to God, and it is to Him we expose our true nature and intentions. Hypocritical and insincere praying will never be acknowledged by the Lord. Though there are many times when public prayer is appropriate, it is far better to pray in private, but always our words must come from a pure heart.

Let us avoid repetition and insincerity in prayer. Empty words have no value with God. There are those who think that their lengthy prayers move the hand of God on their behalf, but this is not the case. Repeating phrases over and over is the practice of heathenism rather than genuine Christianity. Those who pray in such a fashion do so without any emotion whatsoever. God knows all that we need even before we ask, so there is no reason for superstition, repetition or endless words in prayer. Instead, let us pray from a clear heart that is dependent upon Him who can supply all our needs through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19).

The model prayer

The Lord Jesus reveals how we can pray so as to avoid the excesses of the hypocrite and heathen. This model prayer lists all the things we can reasonably pray for or want. This prayer promotes the glory of God, and it contains all our obligations to Him and others. It is the expression of a pure and holy heart. There are three parts to this prayer.

1. The preface

a) Our Father. Only the true child of God can base his prayer upon this model. Only someone who has been born again through the blood of Christ can call God his Father. He is our Creator, Sustainer and Provider as well as being our Heavenly Father (Galatians 4:6). Daily He watches over us for good. Let us acknowledge Him as Lord over all.

b) His name is holy. God is perfect in every way, in His love, nature, and attributes. We must pray that our holy God’s name might be glorified throughout

this world (Habakkuk 2:14).
2. The petitions
a) Thy Kingdom come. Do we really want His Kingdom to rule in our lives, in the lives of those around us, and in actuality upon the earth? Do we truly desire to see the Lord Jesus Christ come back to set up His millennial reign?
b) Thy will be done. Are we willing to obey the will of Him we pray to? If we are, then it means that we commit ourselves to be actively conformed to His will, and that we will obey God perfectly (Romans 12:1-2). There can never be compromise when it comes to obeying God's will.
c) Our daily bread. There is nothing wrong with asking God for the legitimate things that are necessary for daily living. We do not deserve the least of His precious gifts, yet He is willing to bless us with them.
d) Forgive. All sin and hindrances should be cleansed from our lives if we are to serve God from a pure heart, therefore it is right that we should confess them. In light of this, do we really want God to deal with us in the same way as we do with others? We must release even the most hardened offender from his or her debt to us.
e) Lead us not into temptation. God will never tempt us with sin, instead, we fail Him when we are drawn away by our own desires and lusts. God gives us His Holy Spirit so that we might have victory over sin, all evil, and the evil one (James 1:13; 4:7).
3. The doxology
This model prayer closes with thanksgiving and praise. It rejoices in the fact that God is the Sovereign Lord over all His creation. He alone is God, and He rules from eternity to eternity.

Conclusion

We are to be pure in heart in everything we do or say. This purity is the outward evidence of inward holiness. We must have the purest of intentions towards both God and man if we are truly to be regarded as the children of God. All our deeds, words and prayers should flow from our love for Christ and a desire to see Him glorified.

24 December 1750.

The Sermon on Mount 7

"Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly" (Matthew 6:16-18).

Introduction

From the Creation of the world, Satan has sought to dismantle all that God has ordained. He seeks to divide inward religion from outward religion. He has especially been successful amongst those who are ignorant of his devises (2 Corinthians 2:11).

In all generations people have tried to be committed to moral requirements and outward duties without living by true faith in God. They have thought that God would justify them on the merit of their good deeds. Others hold the mistaken notion that a believer needs do nothing but pray, attend church and read books. Because they lack the truth people go to extremes. Such extremes are clearly seen in the area of fasting. Some undervalue it, while others overvalue it. It is either regarded as nothing, or considered to be everything in the Christian life.

Scriptural fasting

Every Biblical writer regarded fasting as abstaining from food for a prescribed length of time (sometimes up to forty days). Superstition and legalism has added all kinds of detail that have no warrant in the word of God. Self-neglect and abstinence from other things is not Biblical fasting. Putting the body through torments is heathenism rather than pure Christianity. The mutilation and deprivation of the flesh speaks more of Baalism than faith.

Partial fasting, such as eating smaller portions, is not supported by Scripture. There is a case for abstaining from luxuries, as with Daniel and his three friends (Daniel 1), for the sake of purity and separation, but this should not be taken as a proof text for the unbiblical Lenten observances amongst some.

Scripture informs us that national fast days were called for by kings, prophets and priests. Such fasting was for national repentance and separation unto God. Repentance, for the most part, is what fasting was instituted for. This gave the sinner added time, away from the normal everyday requirements of the body, to establish his relationship with God.

The reasons for fasting

1. The most important reason for fasting is to have the heart and mind engrossed in the Lord. This means that the believer is absorbed by the things of God and is too impatient with the distractions of life.
2. Fasting is also a sign of grief over the many abominations the believer, nation and the world commit. A person under deep conviction will often not take the time to eat, but instead wants to pray through to the victory.
3. Fasting can be used to hinder the excesses of life. God calls us to be temperate in all things, nevertheless we must be careful not to use fasting as a holy diet.
4. As indicated above, fasting allows the believer more time for prayer and fellowship with God. Thus fasting must always be united with prayer. Fasting without prayer is totally worthless.
5. Though the believer should not fast simply to receive a blessing, it goes without saying that God will bless those who fast for the right reasons. The blessing follows repentance rather than the act of fasting.

How to fast

What kind of fasting is acceptable to God?
1. Those who fast should have their eyes exclusively fixed upon God rather than thinking that there is some special significance in the act of fasting.
2. Fasting must never be done if it is only to make oneself appear holy and pious before men. Nor should the believer make mention that he or she is fasting, in fact they should act as though they are not.
3. We should not think that God must reward us for our fasting otherwise we are going about establishing our own righteousness. The abstaining from food is the least significant part of fasting (Isaiah 58:5), for God is looking on the heart.
4. Do not go too far with fasting. God does not want us to fast our way to ill-health. He has no delight in the destruction of the body. Always remember that we fast to seek His face.
5. Those who grieve over their godlessness and sin show that they have a longing for sanctification. The inward emotion often manifests itself in some outward form. Fasting is a product of this. Fasting, it must be stated again, must not lose its connection with prayer.

Conclusion

God leaves the need for fasting to the individual believer, for there is no

command for collective fasting. It should never be used as a means to an end, nor should it be thought of as a way of twisting God's hand. In its Scriptural setting fasting is an uninterrupted time to get right with God by avoiding the many hindrances of life. God knows those who are pure in heart. He will reward them with the richest of His blessings, for He sees the true motives of their heart.

Sermon on the Mount 8

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:19-23).

Introduction

Our souls are transformed by and into whatever we feed our minds upon. If our attention is on the world then our minds will be darkened and our spiritual life void of holiness and godliness. If we have a heavenly focus then the light of God's nature will flood our souls, and our Christian life will be one of purity and holiness.

The light of the body

The eye represents one's intention, and what the eye is to the body, intentions are to the soul. The eye guides the movement of the body, so the intentions guide the soul. The eye of the soul must be single, that is, focussed on one thing only. This means that all of our affection must be upon Christ. In this sense a Christian ought to be narrow minded.

Full of light

If we fill our minds with true divine knowledge we will maintain a healthy Christian life. Those whose desire, disposition and affection are holy will shine for the Lord in this world's darkness. We become what we fill our minds with. If we seek God in all things, we will find Him in all things. He alone is the fountain of all holiness, continually filling us with His likeness, mercy, justice and truth. If were to daily fix our minds on Christ we would find that our souls are being transformed into His image … "Conformed to the image of his Son … And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." (Romans 8:29; 12:2). We need the "sun of righteousness" constantly shining upon our souls (Malachi 4:2).

Full of darkness

Notice that there is middle ground between light and darkness in the Lord's sermon. There is no grey area between being holy (healthy) and evil (darkness). If our minds are set upon the things of this world then we cannot have a healthy spiritual life, and because of this everything we do is corrupt. If our focus is not single then we will have a veil of darkness covering our hearts and minds, and we will become increasingly blind to the glory of God. We will find ourselves careering towards ignorance and error, and will be unable to discern the true way of God. Our minds become darkened by the god and the things of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4). Are we laying up the treasures of this earth or of Heaven? If we are storing this world's goods then we are focusing upon that which perishes.

How great is that darkness

So many are living in ignorance, error, sin and misery because their motives are earthly rather than heavenly. The shadow of death darkens their souls as they fix their minds on everything but God. The darkness is great because it is a bottomless pit that leads the soul to Hell.

Treasures on earth

Those whose minds are full of lust for the things of this world prove that they do not love or trust in the Lord. We live in an age that is obsessed with material things. People think they can better themselves by accumulating gold, silver and other treasures. This does not mean that we should not provide for the necessary things of life, including food, clothing and a roof over our heads, but it is certain that we ought not to go overboard in them. We should not store up treasures simply for the sake of owning a lot. A good principle is to gain all you can, save all you can, and give all you can. The man who hoards this world's goods finds it hard to enter the Kingdom of God and to follow righteousness (Luke 18:25). Those who go after riches are caught in the devil's snare (1 Timothy 6:9), for "the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10). Death robs the rich man of all his wealth.

Treasures in Heaven

We should invest everything in the Bank of Heaven. This is better security than the world could ever provide. Scriptural treasure will last for eternity. We can lay up heavenly treasure by how we live our lives for Christ on earth. The Lord Jesus tells us, "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of

the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). We can be "Rich in good works" (1 Timothy 6:18). We will lay up treasure in Heaven by doing all for the glory of Christ by using what we own the way He requires. The Lord does not forbid us having things, but He does warn us against allowing things have us. If He commands us to relinquish our possessions for the needs of others, let's do it immediately and not sorrow over their lose. Therefore "Labour not to be rich" (Proverbs 23:4) and "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you" (John 6:27).

Conclusion

Whatever holds our attention while we live in this world will transform our nature, character and outlook. Have the treasures of this present life so attractive that we are unable to see God? Has "gross darkness" invaded our souls that we no longer know what holiness means (Isaiah 60:2; Jeremiah 13:16)? By looking to Christ, and laying up treasures in Heaven, we can be filled with heavenly light.

29 January 1736.

Sermon on the Mount 9

Matthew 6:24-34

Introduction

When Israel was carried away into captivity, the king of Assyria populated their cities with people of other nations. These people “Feared the LORD, and served their own gods” (2 Kings 17:33). They worshipped the true God but did not know Him.

We have a generation of Christians today who resemble these ancient worshippers. They love God but do but serve Him exclusively, for they honour gods of gold and silver, even teaching their children to do likewise. By trying to serve the Lord and riches many believers are careering unto the unavoidable consequences of such an attempt. They will end up hating and denying the true God, for God and Mammon cannot mix.

‘Mammon’ was the name of the heathen god of wealth. Mammon now refers to riches and what it can buy, such as pleasure, comfort, fame and materialism. Both in the world and in the church there is the belief that there is power in wealth. What is believed in is ultimately worshipped.

Serving God

The Christian’s faith ought to be solely in God. He must be trusted every moment as well with the whole heart, soul, and strength (Luke 10:27). He is the Shield and Defender of all who put their confidence in Him (Psalm 144:2). He alone is able to satisfy the believer’s every need (Philippians 4:19). If we claim to love Him then should we not serve Him? Such service proves that we love God. The highest act of worship is to imitate Christ in our daily lives, for our aim should be to be as loving, merciful, gentle and pure as He is.

Man glorifies what he serves. If we truly serve God, then we will glorify Him in every aspect of our daily lives with a single eye and a pure heart. We will glorify Him by walking in holiness. We will glorify Him by being obedient to His commands and zealously avoiding that which He has forbidden.

Serving Mammon

By serving Mammon we mean putting trust in the world and the things of the world in an attempt to find happiness, comfort and support. It should be remembered that Mammon can never have any eternal value.

Serving Mammon means loving the world, something we are commanded not to do (1 John 2:15). The majority think that wealth will bring them joy and peace in this life. They consider riches to be a saviour from all ills, but the love of wealth is the root of all the evil in the world (1 Timothy 6:10).
Serving Mammon means being conformed to and by the world's standards, accepting its morality, and honouring its plans, purposes, desires and attitudes. Mammon has the multitudes walking the broad way to destruction.

Serving two masters

God and Mammon are incompatible. It is not possible to serve both at the same time. Those who only have religion will attempt to serve two masters, but a true believer will not do so.
As believers we ought to serve God exclusively, for by serving Him, we show that we have renounced all false gods. It is absolutely impossible to be a Christian and trust in uncertain riches (1 Timothy 6:17). If we claim to have complete faith in Christ then there is no place in us for the world. The believer has set his "affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2).

Why worry?

Those who are conformed to the world will bear the image of the earthy (1 Corinthians 15:49), but those who are renewed in the spirit of their mind will bear the image of the heavenly (Ephesians 4:23; 1 Corinthians 15:49), and behave themselves as citizens of Heaven.
Those who are conformed to the world worry about life, the body, wealth or the lack of it. On the other hand, those who serve the living God, by placing their faith, trust and confidence in Him, will be free from anxiety and fear (1 John 4:18). True Christians have yielded everything into the hands of God, for they know that He cares for them and that they are accounted more precious to Him than all the birds of the air (1 Peter 5:7; Matthew 6:26).

Conclusion

This world and its riches bring torment, worry and anxiety. These are the product of following Mammon instead of Christ. Placing one's faith in the wrong master damns spirit, soul and body to everlasting damnation. Is it not wiser to trust in the living God and to faithfully serve Him? It is only He that can save, keep and protect us.

1725.

Sermon on the Mount 10

“Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye. Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you. Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:1-12).

Introduction

In this part of His sermon, the Lord Jesus Christ describes what the most common hindrances to holiness are, and reveals the way in which they are overcome.

Judging others

Here we have a warning against vengeful judgement. If we make such judgements against others then we are determining what manner of judgement we will receive in the last day.

Opportunities to judge others present themselves to us on a daily basis, and we may even consider ourselves wise and spiritual while passing out such judgements. We fail to realise that this can cause the fall of another child of God. Also, the unsaved may be hindered from coming to Christ because of this evil. Is it not true that they can often see the sins of the church more clearly than ourselves? We are so busy searching out our neighbour’s faults to recognise our own.

What kind of judgement does the Lord forbid? We may suppose He is referring to slander, but there is more to it than that. The Lord is condemning merciless

judgement both in word and in thought. Any kind of judgement which is contrary to Christian love is evil in the Lord's sight. Here are two examples:-

1) Saying someone is guilty when they are not. This reveals the desire to see and present others in the worst possible light, only to make ourselves appear holier than they are. This includes judging someone else's intentions even though we have no proof to back up what we say or think.

2) Condemning the guilty to a higher degree than they deserve. This is offensive to God's justice and mercy. This is seen when we convince ourselves that the person in question is totally incapable of doing good or following the Lord.

Love does not assume the worst in people, and it refuses to spread bitterness and hatred by speaking evil of them.

The mote and the beam

Yes, we notice the minor faults of others but fail to see the abominations in our own lives. We claim that we know that Christ can deliver man from all of his bondages, yet somehow we cannot feel the satanic chains upon ourselves. Is this not playing the hypocrite? We pretend to be zealous for holiness while in reality we neither love or honour God.

A warning

In trying to help another overcome his faults we may find that we will come off the worse. There are those in the church who will never recognise what true holiness is and so will be offended if you try to show them. Pigs, no matter how thoroughly we wash them, will always return to the mire. So avoid unenlightened zeal. We need the guidance of God to know when to interfere in someone's life. Pearls of wisdom will never heighten their standing.

How to deal with this hindrance

1. See ourselves as we really are. The first step is to acknowledge just how sinful, corrupt, and wicked our sins are in the eyes of God. This is when the Holy Spirit will remove the beams out of our eyes.
2. Stop being careless and indifferent about our own state before God.
3. Instead of judging why not pray. We can pray for those who refuse to listen to us. We can pray for those we consider the most hopeless. God's promises stand firm, therefore all we need to do is believe and pray. Would we not rather have others pray for us than spreading evil?

Conclusion

If Christian love exists within us we will love, respect and deal with others mercifully instead of slandering them. This is a part of what is meant by loving our neighbour. If we are to live by this rule we must first love God, then not only will we abstain from everything which is contrary to love, such as every unkind thought, word and deed. Then we will bestow kindness on others, just as we desire them to do towards us.

Sermon on the Mount 11

"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

Introduction

Many of the obstacles in the Christian life are the result of our own sinfulness and disobedience. The path we take is littered with those who have chosen to go no further, and those going back to damnation. The Lord Jesus Christ warns us of the very real dangers that await us in this path. His guidance will keep us from the way that leads to death.

Hell has a wide gate

It is easy to live on the road that leads to Hell. Entrance through its gate is gained by sin. There is no problem about not keeping God's laws, for they simply do not exist, but this does not mean that the lawbreaker is not guilty before Him.

The whole world is travelling down the route which ends in destruction. All religions, except Biblical Christianity, are guiding souls to perdition while promising their followers paradise.

There are those, even in the church, who are doomed to eternal death. They think that because they professed Christ in the past they are now free to live as they please. If their lives have never been transformed by the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, and if they refuse to live by God's standards, then they are just as much children of Hell as the heathen. Too many still think that there is an easier way to the Kingdom than the one prescribed by the Master.

The majority of every age is doomed to perish because of their flagrant and blatant disregard of God's word. Have we only an outward show of godliness? Are we void of the true righteousness of God?

The lure of the wide gate

Why do people choose the road that leads to destruction? The answer is simple. It requires no effort at all to go along with what everyone else is doing.

Sinners cannot enter through the narrow gate that leads to eternal life until they are willing to be saved from their sin. One who is on the narrow road must exhibit evidence of a transformed life, which is, sanctification. This involves and

includes a thirst after righteousness and a genuine love for God and others.
Few find the strait gate because they choose not to search for it. Instead they are lured, usually by others, down the path of ungodliness. They unquestionably follow their friends, family and traditions, who in turn are following the 'father of lies.' The majority can't be wrong, can they? A life of pleasure appears more appealing than self-sacrifice and holiness.
What enticing words do we have to stop this sea of lost souls careering towards Hell? How can we persuade the sinner that he is heading in the wrong direction? We are usually considered to be fools if we try. To those seeking pleasure and riches the Christian message of living the crucified life is unpalatable. Fear of being thought of as a religious fanatic keep many from the narrow way.

The Narrow Gate

One must strive to enter through the narrow gate and walk the road that leads to eternal life. The lazy and double-minded will soon give up, but the bold will endure to the end no matter the cost. Whilst the easy road requires no effort, the hard road is only found by those who seek it.
We say that we are walking on the right path, but are ours lives any different from those who are lost? Self-deception here will lead us into the very same pit as those who refuse Christ as Saviour. We must be thoroughly focused upon Christ if we are truly Christians. There may be times when we will have to stand alone, but we are never without the Lord by our side. "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1).
All along the way our souls are in danger of countless hindrances and obstacles. Faithless ones will seek to draw your attention and affection away from Christ. We must be alert and continue to walk in holiness. When difficulties come and temptations arise we can offer up unceasing prayer to our Saviour. He did not say that the way would be easy, but He did promise us His presence.

Conclusion

We must strive to enter in, and this determination must continue every step of the way. All of our energy must be used in following the Lord. To walk in purity, piety and mercy we must "Abstain from all appearance of evil", and "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" even to suffer "the loss of all things" for His sake (1 Thessalonians 5:22; Luke 9:23; Philippians 3:8).
Are we truly willing to give up everything, possessions, friends, family, and life itself to follow the Lord? Unless we are prepared to lay aside everything that is

dear to us on earth we cannot say that we have striven to enter through the narrow gate.

Sermon on the Mount 12

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:15-20).

Introduction

Millions of souls populate the regions of Hell because they refuse to be guided by the truth, but would rather follow error. God has ordained watchmen to direct the lost to the only place of salvation. What if the watchmen have fallen into a snare! The church has now become the den of false teachers, who, as agents of the devil, guide souls into Hell.

Who these false prophets are

These men twist the Scriptures (2 Peter 3:16). They misuse God's word to fit into their false notions and doctrines. They never teach others to follow the path of holiness and righteousness, but instead invent easier ways to Heaven. They may use the same theological words as true men of God, but they mean something very different by them. They will speak evil of both the right way and those who walk it. They encourage worldliness, pleasure-seeking, and all kinds of ungodliness. These men are the worst of murderers, for they assassinate lost souls.

The tricks of false prophets

They are careful not to appear to be false prophets. If their true nature was evident very few would follow them. Instead they speak and act as though they are truly men of God, that is, harmless ministers of the gospel of Christ. They deceive the multitudes with an appearance of love and humility. They pretend to be concerned about the social conditions of the world, while they live in luxury. They caution against becoming ensnared by error, yet will never direct the lost to the truth. They are content to have their churches filled with nominal Christians, but will not tolerate a truly faithful follower of Christ. A believer living in holiness unto the Lord is taking religion too far in their eyes. They desire to rend

the true sheep into pieces.

How to discern false prophets

It should be understood by now that it is not what they say or how they appear that gives them away. Their spiritual fruit will always unveil the evil inside. There are basically two rules we can apply when determining who the false teachers are.

1. Look at their lives. Do they live holy and godly? Is there any evidence that they have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:5)? Their activities outside of the church reveal their true nature. The wolf will always associate with other wolves.
2. Look at their followers. It is normal for disciples to follower their leader's example. If all the church members are living worldly and reject the plain teaching of Scripture, it is certain that their minister is a false prophet.

We cannot expect evil men to produce anything that is good. Wolves may dress like sheep but they retain their true nature.

Their fruit may appear desirable but it always leaves a bitter taste. The false prophet will only ever produce the fruit of sin and wickedness. If they accidentally produce good fruit, it will not endure. These men are blind guides leading the blind (Matthew 15:14), and "outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity" (Matthew 23:28).

A word to false prophets

You lock souls out of the Kingdom of God by your teachings and example, and you love to devour those who are striving to enter in (Luke 11:45-52). God will require their blood at your hands.

You deceive others because you have deceived yourselves. You have given yourselves over to strong delusion and the lies of Satan. You may declare yourselves to be the messengers of God, but you neither know Him or the salvation He brings through the blood of His Son.

You will not escape the fires of Hell because of your damnable heresy and example. The tree and its fruit will perish in the bottomless pit. Yet, before the Lord brings this judgement you have time to repent and turn from your wicked ways. Instead of guiding souls to Hell you will then "turn many to righteousness" (Daniel 12:3).

Conclusion

We must be careful about what we hear (and read) if we are to avoid being deceived by false teachers. We should receive nothing until it is fully tested against the authorative word of God. This means that we are to completely reject everything that does not line up with the Scriptures.

Sermon on the Mount 13

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it" (Matthew 7:21-27).

Introduction

The Lord Jesus Christ here teaches that there is no other way of salvation than the one He prescribes. The wise accept, but the foolish the soul-saving power of the Gospel.

Those who build on the sand

Notice that there are those who claim to know Christ yet have no foundation laid in Him. They may pray, and even preach about Him, but this does not qualify them as children of God. It is possible to do wonderful works in His name and still remain lost.

There will always be those who go no further than avoiding wrongdoing. All our good deeds and religious activities can never buy salvation from God. We may think that we are pleasing God, but He is not moved by good works. Those who base their religion on works fail to understand the salvation Jesus Christ paid for by His blood.

Why can they not enter the Kingdom? They do not have the Kingdom within, in other words, the Lord is not enthroned in there lives. Christ does not know them as His own, and, regardless of how many good deeds done, He describes them as "workers of iniquity." Everyone who does not act upon the word of God is doomed to fail and perish forever.

Sooner or later such a one will turn away from God and His word. Temptation and trials will overwhelm them. They fail because there is no eternal support to

sustain them through the storm.

Those who build on the Rock

These both hear and obey God's word. True wisdom builds an eternal dwelling place in the Kingdom of Heaven. These are they who have acknowledged that nothing but the blood of Christ can wash away sin.

The Rock is Christ Himself and His word. Neither He or His word ever changes. Those who build on this foundation know that He is "the same yesterday, today. and forever." This foundation was laid in their lives the instant they began to believe in Christ as Saviour. They are now "hidden with Christ in God" and do all things for His glory.

They who build their lives upon Christ will undergo temptation and tribulation, but because of their faith they will remain standing when the storm is over. They cannot be destroyed for they members of the Kingdom of God which rules over all, and against which the gates of Hell cannot prevail. God is their refuge and strength and a very present help in trouble.

Conclusion

Each person must determine if he or she is building on the rock or the sand. We must ask ourselves, "What is the foundation of my eternal hope?" Are we trusting in religion or Christ for salvation? We cannot rest until we know for sure that He alone is our hope.

Though religious works cannot save the soul, it is still necessary for Christians to be zealous in the things of God. The sign that a life is truly built upon Christ is manifested in faithfulness and obedience.

If for any reason this eternal hope is not in us, then we must fly to the only One who can give us such assurance. Time is fleeting, and the opportunity is lost forever. The fool refuses to take advantage of the Lord's invitation and promise. Do not rest until you know that you are "seated with Christ in heavenly places," that is, you are a citizen of His Kingdom.

If we walk with Christ on earth, then we will reign with Him in glory.

The Origin, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law

"Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Romans 7:12).

Introduction

While as Christians we are not bound to keep the ceremonial laws of Moses, we are not exempt from the moral law. Few understand the significance of the law.
The Law cannot overcome our sin for it can only make it worse for us by revealing how sinful we are. Yet the law is good, for it shows us that we are in need of a Saviour.

The Origin of the Law

The Law of Moses was God's moral code from Creation. Adam and Eve were given commandments to obey. These were engraved upon their hearts rather than on tablets of stone. The breaking of this law caused a rift between themselves and God … " Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Ephesians 4:18.) Though lost in sin, mankind still has this law in their hearts.
Eventually this law was engraved in stone, what we know as The Ten Commandments. These were to be taught to all generations. Why on stone rather than our hearts? Because the heart has become hardened by sin. But God promised a time when He would re-establish the law as at the first … " Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah … But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:31, 33.)

The Nature of the Law

The moral law reflects the high and holy God who gave it. It is His heart revealed to man. It contains an outline of all virtues in a form easily memorized.
The law is also supreme good sense. It is suitable for all people of every age. It is a product of God's eternal mind, a demonstration of His will, and the beauty of His wisdom and holiness.

The Properties of the Law

It would be impossible to speak of all the properties of the law, so here we will limit ourselves to those mentioned in our text – “holy, just, and good.”

1. It is holy. The nature of the law is holy, it is the pure wisdom from above (James 3:17.) When this is reproduced in our hearts it becomes ” Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father” (James 1:27.) This means that it guides us on the pathway of holiness.

2. It is just. The judgements prescribed by the law for breaking it are just. It does not require man to do the impossible, nor does it unjustly pass sentence on the sinner. God’s laws are right and just in everything.

3. It is good. It is because God is good that He gave the law to man. It is good because it reveals that all are in need of the Saviour … “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23.) His love made a way for fallen man to realise their condition, and His love, once the law has done its work, offers the remedy for sin, His Son.

If these things are not true, how could the Psalmist sing, ” More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb” (Psalm 19:10)?

The Uses of the Law

The most important use of the law is to convince the world of sin. This is the special work of the Holy Spirit as the word of God is being preached or taught … “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul” (Psalm 19:7.) It is this which is “like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces” (Jeremiah 23:29) and “is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12.)

After slaying the sinner, the law takes him to Christ so he might live. Once in Christ it directs his life, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, according to God’s will.

Conclusion

The law cannot save anyone; it simply lays us at the feet of the Saviour. From that moment it keeps us in Christ. We are not justified or sanctified through obedience to the law, or else what use is there for the blood of Jesus?

Those who dismiss the need of the law are found exalting themselves above it …

“If thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge” (James 4:11.) But those who understand the reasons for it stand free in Christ … ” But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” (James 4:25.) By using the law in this way we will “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18.)

The Law Established Through Faith 1

"Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law" (Romans 3:31).

Introduction

Paul makes it very clear that the gospel is the "power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Romans 1:16), and Peter declared that "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12.) Therefore no one is justified through the works of the law.

Faith frees us from the 'ceremonial law' but not from the 'moral law.' To think otherwise is to totally misunderstand what the New Testament teaches.

The Relationship between Faith and the Moral Law

The law is being overthrown in our churches because preachers will not speak on the subject. In fact those who do are thought of as legalists. Not preaching it reveals that the preacher is "unskilful in the word of righteousness" (Hebrews 5:13.)

The moral law was given to convince people of their sin and awaken them to their need of Christ. Not to preach it is actually undermining the gospel. If we faithfully preach Christ we must make use of the law. We must proclaim all His promises, warnings, and commands – all that is written in the Scriptures. By preaching the whole Biblical message we preach Christ without overthrowing the law.

Upholding the Moral Law by Faith

The law is overthrown by those who say that faith replaces the need for holiness. They think that that Christian liberty means freedom from obedience and holiness. This proves that their judgement is perverted.

Through the merits of Christ we are accepted by God on the basis of free grace. Grace pardons the one who believes, and enables that faith to work by love and leads to obedience and holiness.

The foundation of our faith is that "a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Galatians 2:16.) This truth does not exempt us from any kind or degree of holiness once we are saved.

The Power of Grace in Keeping the Law

The law is overthrown when a believer refuses to obey God. Paul says, “What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid” (Romans 6:15.) We need to consider this thoughtfully.

As believers we are not under the ceremonial law and traditions. We under the curse of the law. Nor are we bound by dismay and slavish fear. Being in Christ we have God’s grace ruling in our hearts which causes us to obey Him out of love.

Surely our lives have changed sins we have come to Christ! God forbid that we should continue in our old ways. Does not God’s moral law teach us that we are to walk holy in this sinful world?

Conclusion

We should examine ourselves concerning sins of omission. How diligent are we to listening to the word of God and obeying it? We claim to have the faith that conquers the world, but how lazy we are about following Christ! We need to “Remember therefore from whence [we are] fallen, and repent, and do the first works” (Revelation 2:5.)

The Law Established through Faith 2

"Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law" (Romans 3:31).

Introduction

Christians are not called to live according to the ceremonial laws of the Old Covenant, and even less are we to uphold the Mosaic dispensation. When it comes to the moral law it is our duty to live by its teachings, but we must remember that justification cannot come by fulfilling it. If justification came from the moral law then no one could be saved, for all transgress it.

Upholding the moral law

We teach and preach the spiritual message of the moral law in the same way that Christ and His apostles did. It is right and good to declare the whole counsel of God to those who will listen.

We must not water down any part of the word of God to make it acceptable to sinners and the disobedient. This means, just as the Lord Jesus taught from the moral law, we too should proclaim, for in doing so we are preparing the ground for them to come to Him.

Most people today do not have the slightest understanding of what the Holy Bible teaches. There are those who know the words but fail to realise the significance of them. Many preachers, just like the Pharisees of old, misrepresent and misinterpret God's infallible and inspired word. They think that their outward acts of humanitarianism can atone for the lack of inner holiness. Because they do not really love God the spiritual meaning of the law is completely hidden from their eyes. As a result their lives are impure. The outward form of religion may be there but there is no desire, let alone power, to live according to God's righteousness … "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (2 Timothy 3:5.) Is it not true that those who reject the law take the greatest offence when the purity of the gospel is preached?

No matter who is offended, we must speak the truth as Christ taught it. Whether they listen or not, they must be warned. We are not here to be pleasers of men but to please God. We know that, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16.) Let us never apologise for standing firm on the solid rock of God's truth. Let us never be ashamed of the one who saved us.

Faith and love

Faith can never replace holiness, but instead it produces holiness in all its fullness. Holiness has its positive and negative aspects. Most people do not want to consider the negative aspect because they want holiness without obedience.

Faith is the servant of love. The purpose of the law is to give guidance on how believers should love and serve the Lord. This is why love is eternal. Faith will cease, but love never ends … "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity" (1 Corinthians 13:13.)

Faith is wonderful virtue to have, for without it we cannot please God (Hebrews 11:6,) but faith is only strong if it is rooted in love for Him. Some exaggerate faith until it has eclipsed everything else. Adam would have continued to be blessed in Eden if he had not failed in his love for God. Love reigned in his heart, and it had no rival, until the fall. As soon as he disobeyed God he stopped loving Him in the right way. Once the relationship was broken by sin faith was added. Faith was introduced to restore mankind to the love from which it had fallen. Faith has no independent value until it works to re-establish love in our hearts.

A faith that upholds the law

It is good to uphold the law through preaching and teaching, but is it truly established in our hearts? If it is not we are simply 'gongs and cymbals' (1 Corinthians 13:1.) Indeed, if it is not, we are multiplying our damnation. To uphold it in our hearts we must have its full effect in our lives.

Our faith is in the pardoning God who establishes His law in our hearts. It motivates us to ever increasing love for Him, because He poured His love and mercy upon us through Christ. This grateful love for God enables us to love our neighbour, and even or enemy, too.

Because we love God we do not want to do those things which He prohibits … "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15), and "love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10.) True faith, working by love, purifies the heart and cleanses it from all evil affections. We ought not to live by the letter of the law, for loveless obedience is of no use to God, instead we should live by the spirit of the law, fulfilling it by faith because we love our heavenly Father (2 Corinthians 3:6.)

Conclusion

The slightest transgression of the law is an offence to God, but because He loves

us He shines the light of His mercy into the darkness of our hearts. This, the searching rays of His law, reveals sin and directs us to the Saviour. By exercising faith in Him we begin to love and serve the Lord. The more knowledge of God's moral law we receive the greater will be that love, until it is no loner written on stone tablets but deep in our souls.

The Nature of Enthusiasm

"And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad" (Acts 26:24).

Introduction

People who do not know Jesus Christ as Saviour consider believers to be mad. There is a brand of Christianity that never suffers reproach for Christ's sake. It is so bland that even the heathen can practice it.

If we strive for "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" it will not be long before others say we are going too far or that we are mad (Romans 14:17.)

Religion is driving you mad

It is certain that the world pays us no compliment when they suggest we are insane, for they regard Biblical Christianity with contempt. The truth is that they had our faith because it convicts them of their sin.

While the world cannot find a just cause for rejecting Christianity, they still label us, who want to live godly, as lunatics and fanatics. Though they use the term 'fanatic' they rarely understand its meaning.

What is enthusiasm?

The word was invented by the Greeks to describe those who become emotionally affected by religion in a bad way. Nevertheless, in modern speech, the word has three senses:-

1. The positive sense. Both the prophets and apostles did things that were out of the ordinary. They were inspired by God and moved by the Holy Spirit so that their own reason, senses and natural faculties were for a time suspended.
2. The neutral sense. People in the world can be enthusiastic about many things, yet are still believed to be sane.
3. The negative sense. Usually the word is used in a negative way. Those who use it are trying to give the impression that those they disagree with are bad or have some mental defect.

By calling us fanatics they leave the impression that we are confused, lost our reason, or have a mental disorder.

All true religious fanatics are deranged persons, for they usually break with morality, and think that God has called them to act in an evil way. They attribute their wickedness to their god.

Types of fanatic

There are various kinds of fanatic, and in the main they are very dangerous. Here are a few of the most common.

1. Those imagine themselves to be Christians. They claim to be born again, but in reality there is nothing to show for it. They appear at first to be on fire for God, but quickly the flame dies out. These people try to get everyone else sorted out. They seem to be zealous for the Lord and filled with the Holy Spirit, but they are simply hotheads who do not understand the first thing about Christianity. Their lives prove that they have no genuine inner holiness.
2. Those that imagine they have the Gifts of the Spirit. They tell everyone that they are endued with power to work miracles, or to predict future events. Time usually reveals these fanatics for what they really are. It is a fact that God does inspire believers, but we must remember that many only imagine they have been. Look at the damage caused by those who believe they are God's mouthpiece for this generation. These people live by impulses, emotions, and flashes in their minds, rather than the purity of God's word.
3. Those who try to work-up the Spirit. These people want the power immediately, and will do anything to feel like they have attained it. They want to understand the Scriptures, and claim they do, without reading or studying them. They will promote a coming revival or miracle ministry with nothing more than fleshly claims and feelings.

Guard against fanaticism

Shameful consequences are always the result of fanaticism. Fanaticism is rooted in pride and a stubborn spirit. The fanatic imagines that he has a higher guide than the written word of God. They will not listen to reason because they have brainwashed themselves into believing that they are God's special minister. All such people are acting upon Satan's wishes rather than the Lord's.

It is important that we stay spiritually alert and "not to think of [ourselves] more highly than [we] ought to think" (Romans 12:3.) We are not called to destroy other people's lives but to build them up and to save them. Trying to force them to act and think as we do is sinful, instead we must use love, truth, and godly reason.

We must not associate with known fanatics, for in doing so we will bring disrepute to our own character as well as Christ's name.

We must not claim to be what we are not. If we do, we will be seen as hypocrites as well as fanatics.

Conclusion

True Christianity follows its Master for “Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” governs all that it does and says (1 Corinthians 1:24.) The fanatic has no place in the Church of God. The world may think we are insane, but let us not be religious madmen in reality.

A Caution Against Bigotry

"And John answered Him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us. But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me" (Mark 9:38-39).

Introduction

How does this passage of Scripture affect us today in the 21st Century and is it relevant? The fact is, it has more relevance than we think. Though the idea of people being demon possessed has become fantasy in the minds of many, we have to recognise that Satan is very active today … "The devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8.)

In this message we will look at three aspects of our text. First, The way devils are cast out. Second, how to react to those who do not follow our way. Third, why the Lord commands us not to hinder the work. Then we will take a brief look at what bigotry is.

Casting out demons

We must acknowledge that the lost are the children of darkness, for they are under the control of "the god of this world" – Satan (2 Corinthians 4:4.) Demon possession is not a thing of the past, but is just as real as it was in Christ's day. In different ages Satan works in different ways. Today he seems to be hiding the true condition of man behind technology and science. At times he uses superstition and false religion. The effects are the same, mankind refuses to follow the way of God.

Satan is content to have the world think of him as a comic or fantasy figure, even to deny that he exists at all. When it pleases Satan he will swallow up his victims. Today most religious people are at peace with the devil. He has "blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Corinthians 4:4.)

Those who know the Lord Jesus Christ are well aware of the activities of Satan … "for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Corinthians 2:11.) The moral condition of those around us is proof enough of both his existence and the snare he is laying for every man, woman, and child. We understand that his less obvious work is carried out through hypocrites, gossips, liars, slanderers, and the unfaithful.

Though casting out demons has its literal application, bringing a soul to Christ

also destroys the devil's work in his life (1 John 3:8.) At that moment their hearts are purified and their affections cleansed. The Holy Spirit draws them into a holy life. This transformation takes place as soon as Satan is cast out of their lives.

How to react to those who do not follow our way

How should we be reacting to other ministries who are bring people to Christ? Few churches are exactly alike, nor do we worship or conduct our services in the same way. There is often a difference in what we believe on some minor issues. Should we hinder their work in any way?

Too many things that are of no real significance divide those who are truly born again. There may be differences of opinion, but we have the same Lord. There may be just cause for disagreeing with those who are in the ministry, but we must be careful not to become bigots, unchristian, and unloving.

We have to try to see the other person through the eyes of Christ. Jesus reacted very differently than the disciples did when they found one doing a similar work. Would we not be found doing the devil's work if we hindered those who truly love the Lord?

Why the Lord commands us not to hinder the work

Is that other ministry bring souls to Christ? Are they encouraging their listeners to walk worthy and holy? Do we think that we are the only ones who can get the job done?

It should please us to hear that others are witnessing, preaching, and teaching about Christ. If we hinder them God will require the blood of the lost at our hands. The way we can know if the Lord has truly sent them is to look for the signs. If people are getting saved, being set free, encouraged to live holy, then there is no doubt that the minister belong to God.

What bigotry is

If we hinder other ministries because they not of our way of thinking, then we are bigots. Bigotry is defined as having too strong an affection for one's own party, opinion and beliefs. Bigots are stubborn, unloving and resist all who are not exact replicas of themselves.

We become bigots when we are unwilling to believe that God can use someone other than ourselves. We are bigots if we keep sinners from hearing the words of life.

Bigotry is a sin that we must rid ourselves of. We can replace it with Christian love, understanding, and compassion. Our prayer should always be: "Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart. And see if there be any

wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”(Psalm 26:2; 139:24).

Conclusion

Let us be innocent of bigotry. Let us realise that God can use whoever He wants to spread the Good News, cast out devils, and bring men to Christ. We should rejoice when we see the work being done in Christ’s name and for His glory.

Others may be bigoted against us, but that ought never be an excuse for us repaying evil with evil. Let them keep all the bigotry for themselves. John Calvin once said, “Let Luther call me a hundred demons; I will still reverence him as a messenger of God.” (John Calvin, Opera Omnia, 11:774.)

Catholic Spirit

"Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? And Jehonadab answered, It is. If it be, give me thine hand" (2 Kings 10:15).

Introduction

The Royal Law teaches us that we should love everyone (Matthew 5:43-45.) This is Christ's love in His followers, yet very few Christians actually practice it. There are two general hindrances to love between fellow believers: (1) They are not think alike; (2) They do not act alike. Differences in belief and worship may prevent many believers from being totally united with one another externally, but spiritually we can remain as one. The story of Jehu and Jehonadab highlights the need to get true Christian unity into perspective.

Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?

Jehu does not ask about Jehonadab's beliefs or opinions. Jehonadab's family were abstainers from alcoholic drinks (Jeremiah 35), while Jehu was a maniac driver (2 Kings 9.) Their personal preferences did not get in the way of fellowship.

There are many Christians who hold beliefs that we cannot go along with. The important thing is that we recognise that we all err on some matters, therefore it is not our responsibility to pass judgement upon others. We should allow them the same freedom of thought that we have come to expect for ourselves, rather than trying to impose our opinions and pet doctrines on them. Wise men are patient with those who differ from them. God alone will judge all men and their opinions.

Jehu did not question Jehonadab's form of worship. Our beliefs naturally determine our practices and form of worship. What matters most in that we worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:24.) All true worshippers must honour God in holiness and godly sincerity, being convinced in their own hearts that God receives such praise; for each one is personally and individually accountable to God. We should never disqualify someone because they attend another church, even if they actually reject our fellowship.

Our fellowship is with those who accept the fundamental teachings of God's written word. We find unity with those who believe that God is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour of the lost, and who desire to walk in holiness and faith.

Is our faith filled with the power of Christian love? Do we love God with all our

heart, soul, and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves? Do we hate every false way, yet love even our enemies and those who abuse us? Do we have the love that reaches out to all of God's people?

If it be, give me thine hand

Jehu and Jehonadab did not enter into debate but into fellowship. Each believer must cling to what he considers to be most pleasing to God, but not use it as a sword to sever Christian unity. Can we not face this fallen world hand in hand? This means that we must accept others the way they are and for who they are. We must love one another as true brothers and sisters in Christ.

This kind of love assumes no evil, but covers a multitude of sins. It is willing to work through each personal conflict for the glory of God. If we were more willing to pray for each other than criticise God's power would flow amongst us. Criticism is always destructive, but prayer heals, builds up, and comforts. Let's seek to encourage our fellow Christians on in the faith. By joining hands we can lighten each others burden. Many believers need someone to draw alongside to urge them on to a life of holiness, joy, and commitment.

The importance of balance

All true believers ought to possess a 'catholic spirit.' This does not mean that we ignore error, profane worship, and sin in other people or congregations. To do so would be apathy rather than love. Those who have a 'catholic spirit' do not search for new or hidden teachings, for their faith is firmly settled in God's written word. The one who is doctrinally stable will never be found sitting on the fence of liberalism, ecumenism, or false love.

With of course cannot fellowship with those who hold beliefs or practices that defy the plain teaching of Scripture. To do so would find us uniting with the spirit of antichrist rather than the spirit of Christ. Those who seek to worship God by means prohibited by Him can never find unity with the true child of God. We cannot join hands, for whatever reason, with idolaters and infidels. We are not called to be broadminded, indifferent, and apathetic regarding false religion and pseudo-Christian organisations. Our companions are those who love and serve the Lord in faithfulness.

Conclusion

Having a 'catholic spirit' means that we possess Christian love for our fellow man. It produces unity and fellowship wherever it is found. It is found among

those who fear God and desire to do what is pleasing to Him. Having a ‘catholic spirit’ means that we do not reject another believer because we do not see eye to eye on non-salvation issues. Having a ‘catholic spirit’ means that we love and uphold our brothers and sisters in Christ in prayer. We seek to encourage them in every possible way. Having a ‘catholic spirit’ means that we are actually and actively fulfilling the Royal Law.

Christian Perfection

"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12).

Introduction

The teaching of Christian Perfection causes more offence among believers than any other doctrine. Why? Because many cannot tolerate the word 'perfect.' Those who teach it are considered to be the worst of heretics. Some warn us that it is best not to use such terminology, but does not Scripture make use of it? We cannot make room for the devil by modifying the words. In our text Paul indicates that he was not as perfect as he should be. Some who deny the idea of perfection use this as an excuse for their own ungodliness, forgetting that Paul adds, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded" (Philippians 3:15.)

In this sermon we will endeavour to find out in what sense a believer is not perfect, and in what sense he is perfect.

In what sense is a believer not perfect?

(1) Scripture and personal experience reveal that we are not perfect in knowledge. We may understand many wonderful truths, yet there are many areas where we verge on total ignorance. There are apparent mysteries both in the spiritual and natural world we will never fathom out. Do we fully comprehend the doctrine of the Trinity, or how Christ could empty Himself and take upon Himself human flesh? Are we able to interpret all the signs and the seasons? Do we know the exact moment of Christ's return? We fail to understand the way God works, especially in our own generation. Without revelation we would find no answers for the many questions we have. In reality we are not perfect in knowledge.

(2) Christians are not perfect to the extent that they cannot make mistakes. Errors are the result of our limited capabilities. True, we do not err regarding the plain teaching of salvation and sanctification, but we all go astray on everyday matters. How often we have been mistaken about facts and have presented them in a false light? How many times have we misunderstood the intentions of others? Do not even the wisest of Christians disagree regarding the interpretation of some Bible text?

(3) Christians are not perfect with regards to personal infirmities or failures. We

often lapse in the areas of morality, worldliness, evil speaking, and even taking God's name in vain. By infirmities we also refer to physical problems such as slowness of understanding, muddled thoughts, and loss of memory. Do we not all have flaws in manners, speech, and personality?

(4) Every day we have to contend with many temptations. The devil constantly tries to fill our minds with his lies. The fact that we are tempted proves that we have not reached absolute perfection, for do we not give in to it? Except for our Lord Jesus Christ, because we are in the flesh, we are prone to lapses and find it easier to sin than obey God. Nevertheless, those who seek holiness are always moving to higher ground.

In what sense is a believer perfect?

We have to agree that there are several stages of growth in the spiritual life, just as there is in the natural. The apostle John writes to "little children," "young men," and "fathers" in the faith (1 John 2), indicating that this is true, however at no stage is ungodliness acceptable. If we are truly under grace then "sin shall not have dominion over" us (Romans 6:14.) Genuine Christians are free from outward sinful deeds … "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 John 3:8-9.)

Some suggest that these verses teach that believers do not sin to the same extent as the unsaved, but what support is there anywhere in Scripture for such a view? Is this not the same as saying that Christians must sin? We agree that even the holiest of men, Abraham, Moses and David for instance, committed some terrible sins, but this does not mean that there is no victory over it. Also we ought not to measure the Christian life against the failures of men. John makes it abundantly clear that all who commit sin are of the devil (1 John 3:8), and that the child of God does not sin (1 John 3:9.) Does this not speak of the need of Christian Perfection?

To answer the question, "In what sense is a believer perfect?" we submit the following:

(1) Believers have freedom from evil and sinful thoughts. Genuine Christians do not meditate on ways to carry out wickedness, to steal, murder, or lust. Evil intentions come from within an evil heart, but if it has been cleansed through Christ's blood the evil heart no longer exists. Whenever the devil seeks to implant evil thoughts in our minds we can use the spiritual weapons at our

disposal to defeat them … “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:11-12) … “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5.)

(2) Believers have freedom from evil attitudes. The Lord Jesus Christ has called His followers to love their enemies, abusers, and persecutors. This means that they do not retaliate or seek revenge for the wrongs done against them; instead they have a forgiving spirit. Only a purified heart can contain such love as this.

(3) Believers have freedom from an evil nature. The apostle Paul states, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20.) Do not these words reveal that Christians have been delivered from both inward and outward sin? All true believers have had their hearts cleansed by faith, and seek to be pure and holy. They have a new inward nature that affects the outside. Instead of anger, bitterness and unforgiveness there is the spirit of meekness, gentleness, and self-control. If, as some say, we are only freed from sin at death, then does not this make death the saviour? Yes, we do allow sin into our lives, but through the Holy Spirit our consciences tell us that we must “confess our sins” so that the faithful and just Lord would “forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9.)

Conclusion

To suggest that Christ does not give us power over sin is to establish justification by works. But, sin no longer has dominion over the child of God (Romans 6:14.) We do not have to commit sin, have evil thoughts and wicked attitudes. God has created a new and clean heart within us (Ezekiel 36:25-36.

These are wonderful promises! But listen, “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1.) Instead of looking back to the way we were, let us look forward to what we ought to be, to the provisions won for us through the blood of Christ … “Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before” (Philippians 3:13.)

Wandering Thoughts

"Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Introduction

Some mistakenly believe that Christian Perfection includes freedom from wandering thoughts. They think that holy people have their minds totally fixed upon God at all times. False teaching on this subject has caused great distress to those who battle with wandering thoughts, some have even given up their faith in Christ. In this sermon we will try to answer four important questions.

What are the different kinds of wandering thoughts?

There are only two kinds of wandering thought that believers should concern themselves with: (1) those that wander from God and (2) those that wander from natural matters.

It is not unnatural for our thoughts to stray away from God. The fact is that our human nature finds it easier to ignore spiritual things. It tends to think about those things it loves. Even when we are captivated by some teaching, studying God's word, and in intense prayer our minds will make a connection with some worldly thing. While we are in the flesh we will never fully fix our minds upon one thing, but will allow ourselves to dream about food, clothes and other necessities of life.

Each one of us has the ability to fight against the will of God. The human mind will always view obedience in a negative way. We will be dominated by anger, bitterness, and vindictiveness at times. We will day-dream about what might have been and what could be. How often, when studying the Scriptures, have our thoughts focused fruitless and worldly things? This is why we must use the resources God has given to us … "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds" (2 Corinthians 10:4.)

What causes wandering thoughts?

The main cause for our wandering thoughts can be found in our sinful attitudes. The flesh loves this present world and looks for happiness in what it produces. We think more about ourselves than of God and spiritual matters. Our minds are

easily distracted from he Lord by the slightest noise or the most unimportant demand upon out time.

There are many reasons why our minds wander off on a tangent when we are in God's presence. It could be a concern over personal illness or dilemma that sparks a wandering thought. There are those with mental disorders who find it difficult to think straight. Someone may say or do something that attracts our attention. We may simply be tired, fall asleep, or day-dream. Do not our emotions get the better of us sometimes? Has anyone fully mastered their thoughts? Sometimes a single thought sets off a chain reaction in our minds which leads us completely away from where we began.

It does not matter how holy we might become, thoughts will spring up, almost out of nowhere, and demand our immediate attention. The eye and the ear have the habit of hindering our concentration, but we should not forget the devil's use of such distractions. He will use anything that will draw us away from God. He endeavours to fill our minds with thoughts that will harass and confuse us. He knows the exact button to press to get our thoughts off of the things of God.

How can we distinguish the kinds of wandering thought?

There are obviously sinful wandering thoughts, but some are innocent. When we have no thought of God then all our thoughts are sinful. Why? Because we have become atheistic in our thinking. This in turn will produce animosity towards God. Thoughts that arise from sinful attitudes are undoubtedly evil. This is seen where there is pride, unforgiveness and vindictiveness. A good tree cannot bear good and corrupt fruit at the same time. These thoughts may be caused by someone else's words or actions, but we must prevent them festering in our minds.

Innocent wandering thoughts, as we have stated, may be caused by physical weakness, tiredness or sickness. The Lord understands this. Every moment there are millions of changes taking place in our brain that computes messages to our bodies. A simple twitch of the knee might spark a random thought. None of such things are inconsistent with Christian Perfection and our love for God.

How can we be delivered from wandering thoughts?

What kinds of wandering thoughts can we hope to be set free from? Certainly we should be delivered from those that keep us from God, those that oppose His will, and those that bring us into ungodliness. Such wandering thoughts imply unbelief and enmity against God. Satan will use these to destroy us unless we gain the victory over them.

The innocent kind of wandering thought will remain until the cause is removed. Unless the illness is cured, our bodies are fully rested, or external forces removed we will battle with these thoughts daily. Some of the things that cause our thoughts to wander will remain until “this mortal shall have put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:54.) Until Satan is cast into the Lake of Fire he will use temptation to harass and weary us … “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (1 Peter 5:8-9.)

Conclusion

We can bring all wandering thoughts to God in prayer, and He will give us dominion over them. Let us ask that we will be “more than conquers” in every circumstance of life (Romans 8:37.) Those that lead us away from God must be destroyed at the root so that we can be cleansed from “all filthiness of the flesh and spirit” (2 Corinthians 7:1), from every evil attitude, word and deed. Let us pray that God would replace our sinful wandering thoughts with perfect love so that we can love Him with body, soul and strength, and to know what it means to walk in the Holy Spirit and to have His fruit in our lives (Romans 8:2, Galatians 5:22.)

Satan’s Devices

“For we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Corinthians 2:11).

Introduction

Scriptures calls Satan “the god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4) and that he uses various tricks to torment and destroy God’s people. He seeks to hinder believers from living for Christ and being partakers of the “divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4) As Christians we expect to have the Lord’s mind, walk in holiness, and to love others, but the devil has different expectations for us. His aim is to either destroy us or, if he cannot, to impede our progress. He works in opposition to the ministry of the Holy Spirit … “Righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Romans 14:17.

Understanding Satan’s Devices

In what ways does he attempt to halt our growth in Christ?

1. He will attack our joy. If he can get us to sin he knows that we will condemn ourselves and feel unworthy of Christ. He will have us think that we will never see the Lord until a far greater work of sanctification has taken place in our souls.. He will distort our need of perfection so that we are continually looking inward rather than toward the Lord. He has then gained a foothold by stifling our joy for the ground we have already covered. The evidence of this lie is found when we undervalue what we have already received because we condemn ourselves for what we have not yet attained to.
2. He will attack our peace. While we are focusing on our own unworthiness Satan undermines our peace in and with God. We begin to question our acceptance with God. At this point he will trick us into trying to do good deeds so that we may feel justified before the Lord. He wants us to believe that the foundation of justification is within us rather than in Christ. We need to remind ourselves that we are “justified by His grace”, “justified by His blood”, and that “being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” we are members of God’s family (Titus 3:7, Romans 5:9, Romans 3:24.) Satan may have us focus on the small amount of fruit in our lives to convince us that we are not saved, but we must fix our attention on the One who paid the penalty for our sin. If we do not then Satan will bring us under fear again.
3. He will attack our righteousness. As he sees you moving to higher ground he will attempt to divert you from the pathway of holiness. He will use the weapons of fear and condemnation to accomplish this. Fear clogs up our spiritual life and

halts our progress towards perfection. Our faith will falter and our foundations begin to crumble. Our love for God will grow colder as we give in to fear and unbelief. Satan always brings his heaviest artillery against those who hunger and thirst after the righteousness of God.

4. He will attack our faith. He will do this by getting us to worry about tomorrow. By focusing on what we ought to accomplish tomorrow we do two things: (a) We neglect to develop the present and (b) fail to regard how far God has already brought us. This lie can get into our minds when we compare ourselves with holy men and women of old. We then try to emulate them rather than Christ. Satan would have us believe that they were perfect. By following this device he knows that we will become more unholy than we think we are.

Resisting Satan's Devices

We understand that Satan will quench our righteousness, peace, joy and faith the moment we focus upon our sinfulness alone. We can return such fiery darts to their sender by acknowledging our sinfulness yet relying upon the cleansing power of Christ's atoning blood. Our joy will increase as soon as we praise God for the wonderful gift of salvation. God has never given up on any of His children.

Satan may make us feel too unholy to stand in the presence of a Holy God. He will say that we cannot be saved since there are still impurities in our hearts. Remind him that we are not saved by our own righteousness but by the "righteousness that comes by faith" (Romans 3:22.) Our justification is based upon God's grace not on our own merits. The Bible teaches us that it is by grace through faith that we are saved (Ephesians 2:8.)

We may be tempted to lay down our shield and sword the moment we feel that the pathway of holiness is to tough, but recognise as a Satanic trick. No matter how difficult the way becomes we have "an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1.) We can boldly say, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20.) With Job we can proclaim, "I know that my Redeemer liveth" (Job 19:25.) When tormented with this temptation let us instead desire to know God more.

God has created the golden chain of pardon, holiness and heaven, and each link is vital for our faith in Christ. Jesus Christ has forgiven us. Jesus Christ is making us fit for Himself. Jesus Christ is preparing a place for us in His Kingdom. We are indeed the "general assembly and church of the firstborn", and

Jesus Christ is the “Author and Finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:23, 12:2.)
Instead of condemning ourselves over how much more needs to be accomplished in our hearts, let us look back and see the distance we have already covered. Let us praise God for our deliverance so far, for it is only a foretaste of things to come. Let us take the Psalmist’s advice, “Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD” (Psalm 27:14.)

Conclusion

God searches our hearts and is fully aware of our true intentions. He has given us all we need to grow in grace. Instead of trying to claim tomorrows grace use what He has provided for today … “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9.)
Yes, we need to be perfect, but it is accomplished day by day. The fact that we are not yet perfect should be no hindrance to our aiming for it. It may appear to be impossibility, but God is in the business making the impossible possible. In Him alone we can “go from strength to strength” (Psalm 84:7) in submission, patience, humility, thankfulness and holiness.
Satan will try to hinder every step we take, but we must continue to “run with patience the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1) until perfect love reigns in our hearts and we reign with Christ in glory.

Original Sin

"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5).

Introduction

How the Bible describes human nature is entirely different from what man considers himself to be. Most people think of themselves as moral, virtuous, self-sufficient and good. We live at a time when political correctness forbids us saying a disparaging word against others despite the obvious wickedness they commit.

Scripture teaches us that "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12.) All of Adam's offspring are indeed "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1) and are "by nature the children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3), for "They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Psalm 14:3.)

Man's Condition before the Great Flood

Our opening text was true of every man, woman, and child alive at the time of Noah. The earth was closer to its original beauty, yet only Noah "found grace in the eyes of the LORD" (Genesis 6:8.) In the short time between Adam and Noah mankind had become completely corrupt. Notice, they were not destroyed just for what they did, but for what they were. Their thoughts and reasoning were contrary to God's will. Their wickedness was the outward fruit of a perverse heart.

Many of those people would have been consider good and moral by today's standards, but not according to God. We may have got along with them but the Holy Spirit could no longer abide them (Genesis 6:3). Noah pleaded with them for 120 years to repent, but his preaching fell upon deaf ears (2 Peter 2:5.) Year by year, moment by moment they became more corrupt and perverse.

Man's Condition Today

God, the Bible teaches, "searcheth the reins and hearts" (Revelation 2:23), so He knows what is in every one of us. Everyone has turned aside from the path of truth and holiness, nobody can be considered to be good. Therefore the whole world stands ready to be judged by the Holy God.

Daily we are presented with the ever increasing evil perpetrated by man, yet we are told that he is basically good. The natural man is blind to the true condition of humanity today. Because they have no spiritual understanding they cannot see their spiritual needs. Only God can open their eyes to see how wicked they really are. They cannot love God and His ways until they know Him personally for it is not in his nature to seek the Lord … "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Romans 3:18), therefore they are practical atheists being "without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12.)

Man refuses to worship God, yet sees nothing wrong with exalting himself. All who do not submit to Christ are gross idolaters. They are stamped with the image of Satan rather than of God. Here are a few signs to prove the point:

a) Pride of life. Pride is idolatry, for it always robs God of His glory. Everyone wants to be honoured and applauded regardless of the wickedness they involve themselves in. They think they are something if they have achieved position, wealth and education.

b) Stubbornness. The desire to have one's own way despite the consequences. We sin and disobey God because we want to.

c) Love of the world. Man seeks happiness and contentment in the things of the world rather than in God. He seeks pleasure to gratify his human longings, yet see how he behaves like an animal rather than God's special creation!

d) Desire of the eyes. Man wants everything he sees. The more covetous he is, the more evil he becomes.

Conclusion

Fallen man does not know the full extent of his depravity until he comes to Christ for salvation. It is not the few, or even the majority, that stand condemned before the Living God; it is every person on earth. He will become more perverse as he maintains that he is basically good. Biblical Christianity declares that all people are born in sin (with original sin); that by nature man is hostile towards God, and that he will not submit to His will.

The so-called 'educated' may ridicule the doctrine of original sin, but this only proves that they are as blind as the uneducated heathen and pagan. They will admit that man's vices are often uncontrolled, but will never accept that it comes from the condition of the sinner's heart. Instead they will blame it on society, the church, or the need of education.

It is impossible t be a Christian and reject the doctrine of original sin. Only by accepting it can we determine why Jesus Christ died for the sin o the world. Through His sacrificial blood salvation is offered to all who would repent. A

new heart (cleansing the heart of original sin) is available to all. Can you see what Jesus spoke of the need to be “born again” (John 3)? He is able to change the old sinful nature to one that is holy and righteous … “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22.) God has the cure for the sin-sick heart. Accepting Christ as Saviour is the only sure way of purifying the soul. “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20.)

The New Birth

"Ye must be born again" (John 3:7).

Introduction

Justification by faith and the New Birth are two fundamental doctrines of Biblical Christianity. Justification refers to God's work of forgiveness of sins, whilst the New Birth is the actual renewal of our fallen nature. Both works happen simultaneously. The moment we receive "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24) we are "born of the Spirit" (John 3:8.) It is important that we do not separate these two doctrines. Without the New Birth justification is valueless; and without Justification the New Birth is impossible.

The Foundation of the New Birth

Why must we be Born Again? To answer this question we must briefly study the fall of Adam. God made man in His own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27.) He was created to be the portrait of God's immortality, to rule over creation, and to walk before Him in holiness. Man was created in spotless purity and free from every sinful stain. If his were not so, then God could not have declared His works to be "Very good" (Genesis 1:31.)

Man was not created unchangeable since God gave Adam and Eve the power of choice (Genesis 2:16-17.) He showed them the possibility of falling from purity and holiness. They fell from their exalted position because they disobeyed the only commandment He gave them. "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17), and they surely died the worst kind of death – they died to God! Now they were disunited from their Creator and became "alienated from the life of God" (Ephesians 4:18.) They "hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God" because sin entered their lives (Genesis 3:8.) God's image no longer existed in them, instead they became unholy, full of pride, self-willed, that is, they took on the image of the one who deceived them; they now had the nature of Satan.

In 1 Corinthians 15:22 Paul tells us that "in Adam all die," and according to Ephesians 2:1 we are all "dead in sin." Our human nature is totally corrupt because we have inherited original sin from Adam. Without the New Birth we would remain with the characteristics of the Devil throughout eternity. Because we are born in sin (Psalm 51:5) we must be Born Again.

The Nature of the New Birth

How can we be born again? How a person is Born Again is not fully explained in Scripture, for it is a work that only God can do. Just as how God brought Creation into being is not fully explained, though by faith we know that He did, so the New Birth is nothing less than a miracle … "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8.) We know the means God uses to impart New Life to the repentant sinner, but the method is within His own power. By faith we accept that what He has promised He will do.

The Lord Jesus Christ brought Nicodemus to understand that only God can transform a child of the devil into a son of God. Everyone who is born in the flesh must be born of the Spirit if they are to enter the Kingdom of Heaven … "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3.) All are lost and in a state of spiritual darkness until they accept Christ by faith. Until then they do not and cannot know God. They cannot understand what authentic Christianity is.

As soon as the miracle of the New Birth takes place there is a total transformation in the sinner's life, that is, "The eyes of [their] understanding being enlightened" they are able to "know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (Ephesians 1:18.) From that moment God commands light to shine in his heart … "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6.

The peace of God suddenly fills the new believer's heart because he know that God truly loves him (Romans 5:1; John 3:16.) Now his spiritual senses will be trained to know how to walk in holiness and purity. Daily he will increase in knowledge of Christ and all things pertaining to His Kingdom. Only God can transform the earthly, unspiritual and sinful into the likeness of Christ.

How does a person get Born Again? Through repentance and faith alone.

The Purpose of the New Birth

The New Birth is necessary for holiness. Religious conversion cannot produce such a radical transformation of nature, for it only regulates man's actions. The New Birth is God's image stamped on the believer's heart. The evidence of such a transformation is holiness and godliness. This nature is only found in those who have the same mind which was in the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:5.) It

involves being lovingly obedient to God's will, and continually thankful for the great salvation God has given to us.
Holiness enables us to present ourselves as "living sacrifices" (Romans 12:1), but if we do not have it then we will never see God (Hebrews 12:14.) Therefore the New Birth is absolutely essential for eternal salvation. Without the New Birth there is no possible way to be made right with God.

Conclusion

There are many varieties of religious experience of which people claim to have had a life-changing effect on them, even using the term "Born Again" to describe them. But the New Birth can only be experienced the way Jesus and His apostles taught it. It cannot come through baptism, sacraments, pilgrimages or out-of-the-body experiences, instead it is freely given by God the moment the sinner repents and exercises faith in Jesus Christ.
God's Holy Spirit, through the atoning work of Christ, transforms all such people. Unless a man is Born Again through the Blood of Christ he remains a child of Satan, eternally lost, and doomed to Hell.

The Wilderness State

"And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you" (John 16:22).

Introduction

Even though God delivered Israel from slavery, they did not immediately enter the Promised Land, but wandered in the wilderness for forty years. During this wilderness state they encountered many trials and fears. The same can be said of those who have been set free from Satan's dominion. Not many enter the "rest" that the Lord has prepared for them (Hebrews 4:9.) This does not mean that they are unsaved or have not been justified. In reality many Christians stray from the path that God has set before them, and find themselves in a wilderness where they are tried and afflicted. Those in such a state deserve our compassion. They may have lost faith, or are finding it difficult to live the way God expects. In this study we will endeavour to understand the condition, the causes, and the cure of the wilderness state.

The Condition

For the most part, loss of faith is the reason why some fall into the wilderness state. They do not have the assurance in God and do not enjoy fellowship with Him. Instead the light of Christ shining in their hearts there is a darkness that blinds their souls. They no longer feel that the Holy Spirit "beareth witness with [their] spirit, that [they] are the children of God" (Romans 8:16.)

Loss of love is another condition. This love rises and falls alongside faith. Without faith one cannot truly love God or feel content in His presence. Whatever love they once had has grown cold and dead. This lack of love is evident in their interactions with other people, for it is replaced with anger, bitterness and resentment.

Then there is loss of joy. Such believers find it increasingly difficult to rejoice in the Lord and be thankful for salvation. The fountain of joy gets dammed up so the living waters no longer refresh the thirsty soul.

Finally, there is loss of peace. That "peace of God, which passeth all understanding" no longer keeps their hearts (Philippians 4:7.) Agonizing doubts cloud the mind, seeking to rid the mind of the serenity and calm it once knew in Christ. Instead of "peace with God" there is binding fear of wrath and death.

Once these conditions combine there is no longer any dominion over sin. Yes, there may be a struggle, but sin will quickly take control and bring the soul into

slavery again, until there is no trace of “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Romans 14:17.)

The Cause

There are various reasons why Christians fall into the wilderness state, but it must be noted that God’s will is not to be listed among the. He desires our sanctification accompanied by “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Romans 14:17.) He has provided everything for our welfare. He does not will our defeat for any reason. Here we will limit ourselves to three main causes for the wilderness state:

[1] Sin. Sin is at the root of the majority of our problems in life. This can be broken down into the following elements:

(a) The sin of commission. This is wilful, presumptuous sin; doing things we know we ought not to. Such opposition to God’s way can only alienate us from Him.

(b) The sin of omission. Rejecting the warnings and checks of the Holy Spirit. It is not doing the things we ought to.

(c) Inward sin. For example, pride and anger. Pride because it is an abomination to God and always precedes a fall (Proverbs 16:5, 18), and anger because it inflames fury, bitterness and an unChristlike spirit.

(d) Unhealthy desires. Typically lust, jealousy and covetousness.

(e) Laziness. Relaxing our commitment to the Lord. Time-wasting offers Satan an advantage over us.

[2] Ignorance. It is a shame that so few believers actually know what the Scriptures teach, but there are those who choose to ignore what God says. Some think that it is normal for a Christian to go through life in constant defeat, struggling with sin and suffering, they call it the ‘cross they have to bear.’ These mystics talk of ‘the dark night of the soul.’ This wilderness is of their own making.

[3] Trials. Trials and tribulations do have a winnowing effect in the church, for they separate the chaff from the wheat. Trials will cause a false believer to withdraw, but the true child of God will grow in faith. Some are in the wilderness because no one taught them that trials must come to test faith. They were never equipped to resist the devil. These poor people think that God has abandoned them. This wilderness is always remedied by simple faith as we trust the One “knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations” (2 Peter 2:9.)

The causes for the wilderness state usually act on us slowly so that we do not notice the change taking place. Gradually we are being drawn away from God’s

light and peace. Only through repentance can we return to the place of blessedness.

The Cure

There is no one-for-all cure for every condition of the wilderness state. Some talk of ‘confessing the promises’ and being positive, but these people only make the spiritual condition worse for the one in the wilderness. This approach to alleviating the problem gives false hope and is nothing but spiritual sham. These promise-mongers destroy instead of heal. These religious charlatans “profane the blood of the covenant” (Hebrews 10:29.)

To assist someone in a wilderness state we must know why they got there in the first place. As stated, sin is usually the main cause, therefore repentance is the cure. If it is pride, then the cure is humility and love. If it is laziness, then the cure is found in stirring oneself up for the Lord. If it is ignorance, then getting to know God and His word is the answer. Do we see how disastrous it would be to get anyone of these people to ‘confess the promises’ or to make positive confessions of faith?

Conclusion

Our God is not an absent God. He does not lead us towards the Promised Land to caste us into a wilderness. Suffering, spiritual darkness, and constant defeat is not pleasing to God, regardless of what well-meaning believers think. They see themselves as martyrs being purified, but the devil is keeping them from the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. Does not the teaching about ‘the dark night of the soul’ promote sanctification through despair rather than faith and obedience? Those who hold to this fantasy will ever walk in darkness.

If the clouds gather around us and we feel that we are lost and helpless in the wilderness, let us look for the cause of the condition. Remove the cause by applying the cure and the condition will disappear. In all such times we can flee to our Deliverer and hear Him say to our souls, “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee” (Isaiah 60:1.)

Heaviness through Manifold Temptations

"Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations" (1 Peter 1:6).

Introduction

Many believers find themselves in times of deep sorrow, but this does not mean that they have done something wrong. Faith may be lost in the "wilderness state", but it is not necessarily the case when someone is burdened with sadness. It is important that we understand the difference, for it is easily for a suffering soul to slip into the wilderness of unbelief. Unless otherwise indicated all Scriptures are from 1 Peter.

Who Experience Spiritual Suffering?

Peter wrote to believers who were undergoing a time of suffering. They certainly maintained faith in God and were destined to reign with Christ despite the severity of the trials (:7.) Their faith remained strong because it was focused on God's preserving power (:8-9.)

Suffering had not diminished their peace with God (:2.) Peter prays that they would experience even more abundant growth in this area. Such peace can only be enjoyed by those who have authentic faith.

They had a true and living hope in Christ (:3.) They knew that they were saved through the power of the resurrected Lord and had an inheritance with Him (:4.) This confidence came because they believed in the sufficiency of Christ's blood (:2, 19, 21.)

The sufferings did not dampen their joy, in fact they "greatly rejoiced" (:6), because they loved the Lord more than life itself. Such joy transcends mere words (:8.)

They did not blame God for what was happening; instead they continued to prove that they loved Him through obedience (:8, 14.)

Despite the heavy hardships they continued to live holy lives (:15-16.) They continued in holiness because they were thankful for the price Christ paid for them on the cross (:18.) Their aim was to live pure lives regardless of what the world or the devil threw at them (:22.) They had inward and outward holiness.

The Nature of Spiritual Suffering

The word "heaviness" literally means "to be made sorry" and "grieved." Peter's

readers were experiencing immense suffering for the cause of Christ. The word also reveals both the degree and the duration of these trials. This burden was not going to be shrugged off very easily. It was not a fleeting emotion; rather it was heart-breaking sorrow and anguish.

These difficulties cannot be compared with the sort endured by those in the wilderness state. Those in the wilderness got there through sin and unbelief, therefore they cannot rejoice and have peace and confidence in God. Those undergoing heavy trials remain faithful, they rejoice, and are kept by the power of God (:5.)

Why Do Such Sufferings Come?

Peter speaks of these trials as “manifold” (:6), meaning “various in character and type.” They may include bodily and mental suffering as well as spiritual.

Few believers will get through life without several times of severe trial upsetting their spirit, mind and body. Sometimes these trials rush upon us like a “whirlwind” bringing “distress and anguish” (Proverbs 1:27), and cannot hinder their approach, we can trust that they will pass away.

Sometimes financial problems can cause sorrow. Let us remember that God provides for each of His children today, just as He has wonderfully blest us in the past.

Crippling heartache often causes heavy sorrow. This is certainly true when a loved one dies, especially if they are snatched away at a young age. But are not our hearts heavy burdened for those who are dead while they live? It is painful to watch backsliders determined to go their own way and heading for destruction.

In all these circumstances Satan is ready to pounce, for he is like “a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8.) He fires his flaming darts at those already experiencing suffering so that he might weaken and destroy their faith. The serpent wants to inject the venom of blasphemous and unbelieving thoughts. He wants to revive our natural opposition to God and bring us back into bondage.

It must be pointed out that the mystic, with his “dark night of the soul,” is wrong in teaching that God purposely withdraws His presence from obedient Christians to teach them a lesson. Where does the Scripture teach such an abomination? Yes, God allows trials to test our faith, but He never hides His face from us.

The Results of Spiritual Suffering

Why does God permit sufferings and trials to come our way? The answer is indicated in 1 Peter 1:7. In fact elsewhere Peter says that we ought not to be

surprised if they do come our way (1 Peter 4:12-13.) Therefore our faith is refined and purified through personal suffering and trial, for we will come out of them, not weaken, but more stronger and valiant for God. Instead of being defeated we will know “exceeding joy.”

Love will increase along with faith. We learn that God can be trusted to help us through future problems, and that He will bless us more than we can ever know.

Trials can cause a growth in holiness of heart and conduct. Afflictions have a habit of subduing our self-confident spirit, taming our sinful nature, and softening our stubbornness towards God. They cast us upon Him and bid us to die to the world and the flesh. Out of all our trials will come great reward and peace for our souls. In fact they are an indescribable gain … “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17.)

Conclusion

Sufferings do not mean that God has left us or that we are in a wilderness state, but it is possible to descend into such a condition if we do not maintain faith. In the deepest sorrow we can walk in faith, hope, love and holiness. There is no reason to give up. We must trust that God knows how to work His purposes and plans out in our lives … “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28.)

We need to stay alert, watch and pray so that we do not fall into spiritual darkness. We need to wait patiently upon God. Let us continue to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1), and daily “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18), until He receives us into His eternal Kingdom.

Self-Denial

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

Introduction

These words of Jesus apply to all of His followers in every generation, no one is exempt from them. The teaching of self-denial is not the same a performing some religious duty, instead it is fundamental to remaining a true follower of Christ. If we are not doing it, then it is obvious that we are involved with the world and avoiding the Lord. How can we follow the crucified Lord without daily taking up the cross?

The Meaning of Self-denial

Self-denial is pointless unless it is for the cause of Christ. The human nature opposes and argues against it. Satan and the religious world detest the form of self-denial that includes taking up the cross. To the majority of believers today, self-denial is a thing of the past; no wonder it is not taught from the pulpit today. Many Christians think of it as legalism, and consider those who practice it as trying to establish their own righteousness (Romans 10:3.)

Self-denial the rejecting or refusing to do our own will, and knowing that God's will is the absolute best path for us. But this is not a complete explanation of the doctrine. Since we were born sinners, it is in our human nature to gravitate towards sin. This is were self-denial can play its part, for those who seek to be holy use it as a straight path into the presence of God. So, instead of following the inclinations and desires of the flesh, they walk the pathway of holiness by doing God's will instead.

Given the opportunity the flesh will indulge itself and never give a thought for the things of God. Self-will brings pleasure, but it brings death too. Therefore self-denial is the rejection of everything that is opposite to the will of God. It is refusing to drink the deadly poison of sin, no matter how good it is to the taste.

Taking up the Cross

Daily taking up the cross is a step higher than self-denial. It involves not only the deprivation of the flesh, but also suffering and pain for the cause of Christ. If we are truly running the race that is set before us (Hebrews 12:1), then we will soon find a cross lying on the track, a cross which must be borne if we are to complete

the course. We only have two choices here: return to our old ways or keep moving forward despite the burden of the cross. The Lord Jesus Christ illustrated this suffering and pain when He spoke of plucking out the eye and cutting off the hand to reach the Kingdom (Matthew 5:29-30) Do we not see that everything that hinders our progress must be eradicated from our lives?

The tearing out of an affection or desire from our lives is never easy. But when we do, we are placing ourselves into the Refiner's fire of sanctification. The rich young ruler who came to Jesus found it too painful to give up his wealth. Until covetousness was purged from his heart he could not follow the Lord (Luke 18:18-25.)

God has prepared a cross for each of us, and we are obligated to carry it every day of our earthy existence. Nevertheless, this cross is for our eternal good. Such self-denial is a form of discipline and discipleship that proceeds towards perfect holiness.

The Need of Self-denial

The reason why we often fail to live as followers of Christ is due to the fact we do not practice self-denial. Also it is one of the reasons we fail to receive the blessings He has prepared for us. We find it easier to take up the world than the cross.

Why is it that so many hear God's word but never act upon it? Is it not because of some sin in the heart that they are unwilling to give up? It is impossible to follow our own will and God's will at the same time. Their senseless minds remain darkened while they continue to perform that unholy desire. Without self-denial the believer would quickly slip back into spiritual and moral bondage.

There are those who clearly love the Lord and would never return to the world, yet they fail to attain faith and the blessings. Once again, it is because they will not commit the entire spirit, soul, and body to the Lord. How many claim to be filled with the Holy Spirit while continuing in sin? No matter what they profess, God does not reign and rule in their lives. They are constantly giving place to the devil (Ephesians 4:27) and grieving the Holy Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:30.) They are unwilling to pay the price of "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:18) and are therefore making shipwreck of their faith (1 Timothy 1:19.)

If we no longer hunger and thirst after righteousness (Matthew 5:6) then it is certain that we are not denying the flesh. Maybe we are not as zealous as we once were. Maybe we no longer desire to prayer, study the Scriptures, and worship. Maybe we have given ourselves over to enjoying the world. These are

the results of not taking up the cross daily. Truly faith is not brought to perfection, thus we hinder our growth in Christ. Not completely following the Lord leave us dead in sin and falling short of reach “mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14.)

Ignorance concerning Self-denial

There will always be those who will reject the doctrine of self-denial, but it only goes to prove that they do not know “the scriptures, nor the power of God” (Matthew 22:29.) They ignore multitude of texts, as well as the general message of the Bible, regarding this subject. They are ignorant concerning the work of the Holy Spirit in a believer’s life. They are deceivers who are “weighed in the balances, and art found wanting” (Daniel 5:27.)

There are others who will not study the doctrine because they do not want to see their need of self-denial. They appeal to the excesses of the mystics as a reason for not practicing it. But regardless of who might abuse the doctrine, is it not in the word of God?

Many ministers of the gospel do not oppose the doctrine, yet they will not teach it either. If they want to be free from the blood of their people it must be taught. By teaching it they will save their own souls as well as those of their hearers.

Conclusion

We must put this doctrine into practice in our lives daily. We should ponder it and seek to understand all there is to know about it. If we delay then we hamper our progress in holiness. If we do not deny the flesh and bear the cross, then we are not true followers of the Lord. Until our spirits return unto God, let us set our hands to the plough and not look back (Luke 9:62.)

The Cure of Evil-speaking

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican" (Matthew 18:15-17).

Introduction

"Speak evil of no man" says the apostle Paul in Titus 3:2. The command is s clear as "Thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13.) Few believers understand the command, even fewer obey it.

Evil-speaking is not the same lying or slandering another person (as some think), it is commonly known as backbiting, gossiping and spreading rumour. It is speaking evil about someone behind their back. This sin is rampant in our churches. How many can declare their innocence before God?

It is a sin that is not so easily avoided; in fact it can quickly sweep us away like a flood. It feeds of off the faults of others. It religious and self-righteous pride. It is not easily avoided because it often disguises itself as zeal for God and concern for others.

Is there a way for evil-speaking be avoided? According to our text there is.

Private Exhortation

We should go to the one in the wrong instead of 'sharing' the matter with others. We must be careful that we have a holy and humble attitude towards the person concerned. Our aim ought to be reconciliation rather than trying to make the offender feel guilty; therefore the spirit of love and gentleness is vital. Being full of pride and self-righteousness will only make the situation worse. We should bring before the person what the word of God says. In doing so we must acknowledge that our lives are being observed by the Judge of all the earth too.

The Lord commands that we face the person alone. We must not take further steps before this; otherwise we make ourselves as unrighteous as the one who has offended us. Speaking to others about the problem should be avoided, no matter how 'burdened' we feel about it. We ought to be burdened, but not desirous of denouncing the person. If we go to others first, it only proves that we have hatred in our hearts towards our brother in Christ. We will never have peace in our hearts if we go any other way about this.

Evil-speaking is a deadly poison. It is never justifiable to gossip and backbite.

Taking a Witness

What if the offender refuses to listen to us and become enraged? Sometimes gentle reproof does not work, only then it is necessary to take an observer with us. The witness should be of a gentle spirit too. This person must not be biased towards our point of view, instead he must be impartial. At this point four things should be done:-

1. Reveal why it is now important for a witness to be present.
2. Talk about the problem itself.
3. Show that the reproof is righteous.
4. Repeat the need for reconciliation.

The witness can then testify that everything was done correctly if the matter has to be taken further.

Taking it to the Church

If all our attempts for reconciliation are rejected, then we have no other choice but to present the facts before the whole church. This is our own church; do not spread the details to members of other congregations.

Go to the leadership of the church first. It is their duty to judge the situation and to openly reprove the offender if needed. At this point we have done all that is required of us.

If the guilty party still refuses to be reconciled, we are under no obligation towards them, except that we entrust them to God in prayer. We do not have to speak to them any more, in fact they are to be treated as “Gentiles and Tax-collectors”, that is, do not fellowship with them. Leave them to the Lord, do not seek revenge, but continue to love them in the Lord. Remember though, we still owe them common courtesy and kindness as occasions arise.

Conclusion

It is our duty to refuse to listen to any evil report about another person. If there were no listeners, there would be no gossip. The receiver of stolen goods is as bad as the thief. As soon as an evil report begins to sound in our ears, let us put a halt to it immediately.

If we happen to be the one to whom the wrong has been done, then follow the steps that the Lord commanded. If we share our ‘burden’ then we are making others partakers of our sins. We must shun evil-speaking, and “Follow peace

with all men” (Hebrews 12:14.)

How quickly difficulties would be cleared up if we would love “one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Peter 1:22)! The world would have to take note of how we love one another. Is this not the kind of spirit Christ prayed for? In John 17:20-21 He prays, “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me.”

May the Lord enable us to love one another in word, in truth and in action, just as Christ has loved us.

The Use of Money

"And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations" (Luke 16:9).

Introduction

In this parable the Lord Jesus Christ explains what the bad steward did to prepare for the future, that is, he acted prudently (Luke 16:1-9.) "And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light" (:8.) The unsaved are not truly wise, but they are not fools when it comes to money.

What is the Lord advising in this parable? Simply this, prepare for the future by using money correctly and being good stewards of what God has blessed us with. Yes, "the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10), but the fault lies with the user not the money itself. We cannot avoid using it. Without it we can do very little. We need to be faithful managers of our finances. Here is sound advice: "Gain all you can, save all you can, and give all you can."

Gain All You Can

This does not mean that we should gain wealth at the expense of health; for no labour is good that makes us ill. We need good food and good rest. This is true for our minds also. We ought not to work at that which is contrary to the Word of God and good conscience.

In gaining all we can we must be careful that we harm no one or their property. The gambling industry does just that. Christians should not be involved in loan companies where an excessive amount of interest is charged. It is no good to sell our products below the true value of them, otherwise we undercut another seller and thus destroy his income, and deserve to earn the damnation of Hell. To increase our income in any of such ways is particularly evil, and prove that we do not love our neighbour (Matthew 22:39.)

We can gain all we can through honest labour and wisdom. This involves making the most of the time God has given us. Do our lives have to be unprofitable by indulging in time-wasting entertainment and amusements? No, Scripture says, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (Ecclesiastes 9:10.) Never procrastinate by putting off until tomorrow what should be done today. God has given us a brain and expects us to use it. Some people never improve themselves, but instead continue with the same dull lives

that they lived yesterday.

Save All You Can

Many are guilty of waste in that they are not making good use of what they have. Nor should we misuse our finances on trivial things, that is the same as throwing your money down the drain. Do not spend to gratify “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life [riches]” (1 John 2:16.) Do we need to have expensive tastes in food, drink, fashion and furnishings? Therefore cut out all unnecessary expenditure and be content with the simple things of life. We ought not to be free with our money to win the praise and admiration of those around us. Some do this at restaurants and clothing stores. Let us be content with “the honour that cometh from God” (John 5:44.) Experience proves that the more we gratify the flesh, the more it expects to be pampered. Do we really need that thing we long after?

Some parents waste money on their children by buying costly clothing and constant treats. Are they not developing evil desires in their offspring? Are parents not laying snares and temptations in the way for them? Such actions are truly preparing their souls for damnation. Have pity, and remove everything that might increase their sins in the future.

What if you have a large sum of money in the bank? Who should you leave it to when you are gone? Would it be right to leave it to a relative who misused his own money? We should only leave an inheritance to those who would use it correctly. If there are not, then leave it as a legacy to those engaged in spreading God’s truth and glory.

Give All You Can

Gaining and saving is not the end of the matter. Storing money away is just as unprofitable as not having any.

The Creator placed us here, not as owners, but as stewards of the earth. He owns all things and has given us His possessions to enjoy for a time. Even our spirit, soul and body belong to God (1 Corinthians 6:19.) Added to this, He has promised us a “far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17.)

There are three things that ought to be done with money:

1. Provide for our basic needs – food, clothing, health, and shelter.
2. Provide for the needs of your household and for their future.
3. Provide for the needs of those who fall into difficulty in the family of faith.

Paul says in Galatians 6:10, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good

unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." If we do this we are actually giving to the Lord … "unto God the things that are GoId's" (Matthew 22:21.) In giving we have to continue to be good stewards by being obedient to God's word. In truth our giving is offered up as a sacrifice to God (Philippians 4:18; 1 Peter 2:5). Let us not give to receive reward or praise from man, "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works" (Matthew 16:27.) This is the way to make friends with "the mammon of unrighteousness" (Luke 16:9), because when we are in need, other will help us.

We tithe a certain percentage of our income, but let us not justify ourselves before God as did the religious leaders of Jesus' day Instead give to God that which belongs to Him, holding nothing back. If we have given ourselves to God, then it includes our bank balance too.

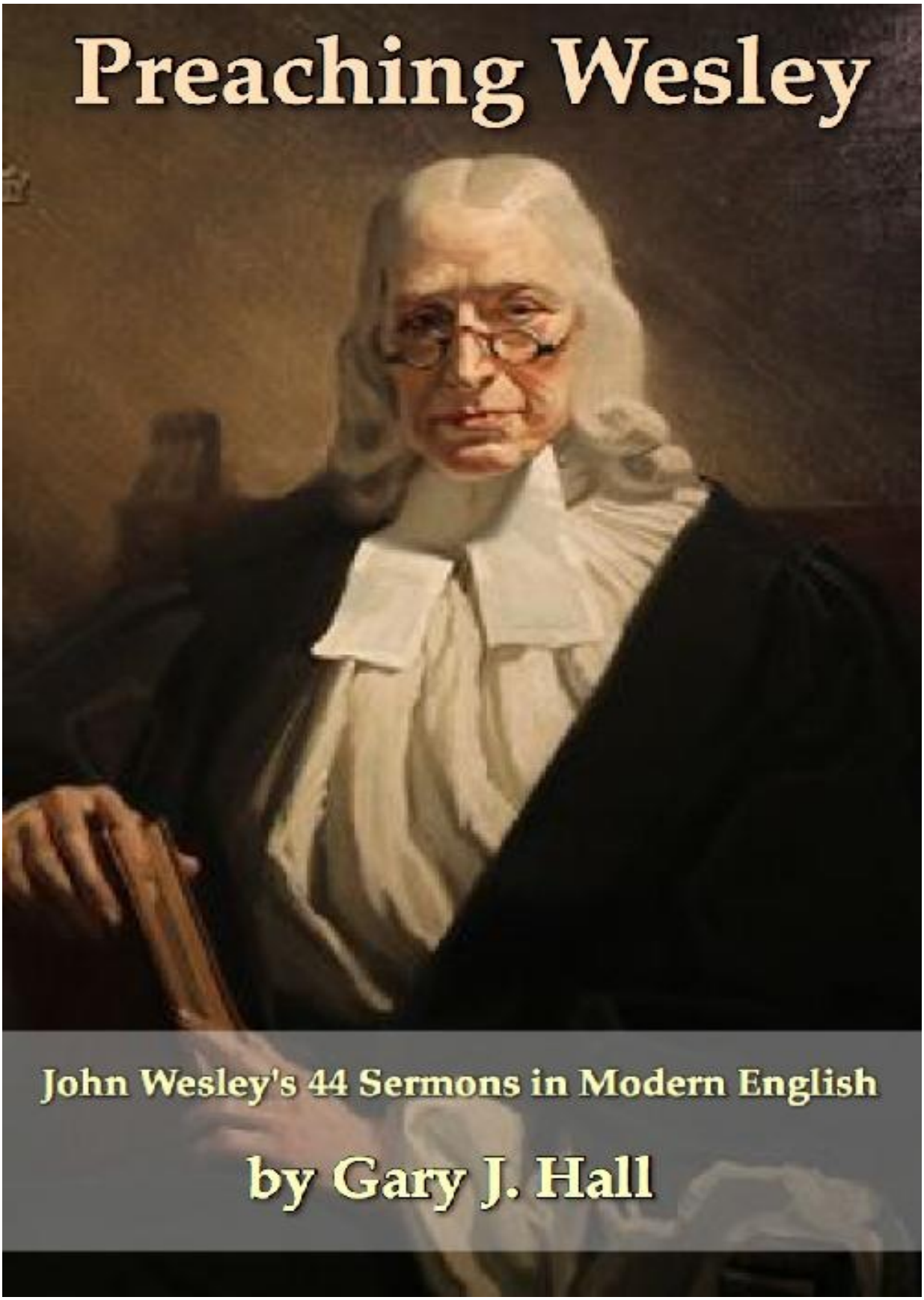
Conclusion

Can we be faithful stewards and mismanage what God has blessed us with? Don't consult with financial advisors regarding your money; instead consult God and His word. Our Kingdom is not of this world, but we are citizens of Heaven (John 18:36), therefore we need to listen to the Lord. Let us not delay putting these things into action … "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (Ecclesiastes 9:10.) Let there be no more wasting our money on food, fashions and lusts of the day.

The right use of money is no small part of the "wisdom of the just" (Luke 1:17.) By gaining all we can, saving all we can, and giving all we can, we are "Laying up in store for [ourselves] a good foundation against the time to come, that [we] may lay hold on eternal life" (1 Timothy 6:19.)

I Hope that you have found this book helpful. If it has been a blessing to you, please review it on Amazon.

There are audio sermons to accompany these sermons by Wesley. Please go to https://predikuesi.wordpress.com/preaching-wesley


Preaching Wesley
John Wesley's 44 Sermons in Modern English
by Gary J. Hall

1. Preaching Wesley
2. Salvation by Faith
3. The Almost Christian
4. Awake Thou that Sleepest
5. Scriptural Christianity
6. Justification by Faith
7. Righteousness by Faith
8. The Way to the Kingdom
9. The First-fruits of the Spirit
10. The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption
11. The Witness of the Spirit
12. The Witness of Our Own Spirit
13. The Means of Grace
14. The Circumcision of the Heart
15. The Marks of the New Birth
16. The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God
17. Sermon on the Mount 1
18. Sermon on the Mount 2

19. Sermon on the Mount 3
20. Sermon on the Mount 4
21. Sermon on the Mount 5
22. Sermon on the Mount 6
23. The Sermon on Mount 7
24. Sermon on the Mount 8
25. Sermon on the Mount 9
26. Sermon on the Mount 10
27. Sermon on the Mount 11
28. Sermon on the Mount 12
29. Sermon on the Mount 13
30. The Origin, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law
31. The Law Established Through Faith 1
32. The Law Established through Faith 2
33. The Nature of Enthusiasm
34. A Caution Against Bigotry
35. Catholic Spirit
36. Christian Perfection
37. Wandering Thoughts

38. Satan’s Devices
39. Original Sin
40. The New Birth
41. The Wilderness State
42. Heaviness through Manifold Temptations
43. Self-Denial
44. The Cure of Evil-speaking
45. The Use of Money